









THE CIA AND FRENCH INTERPOL ARE OFFERING A
REWARD FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE
WHEREABOUTS OF THIS MOST WANTED MUPPET





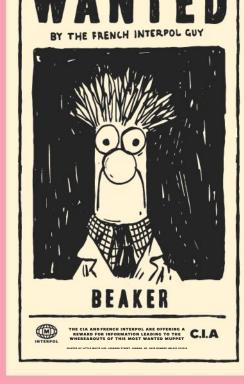








WANTED

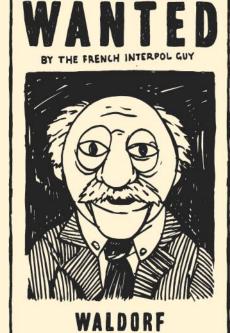




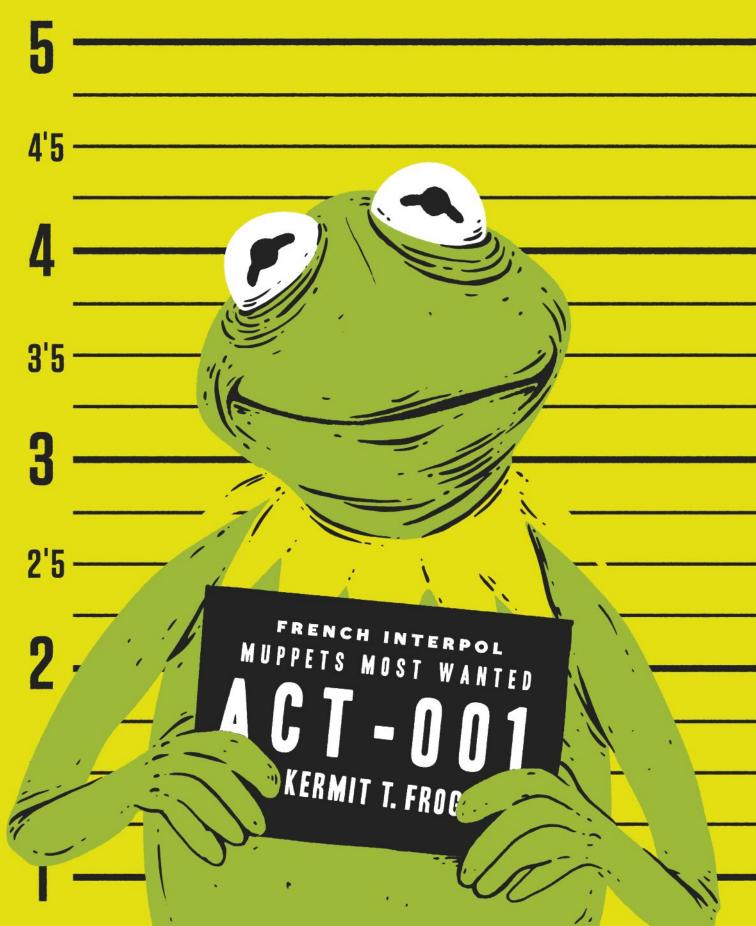








03













Directed by JAMES BOBIN
Starring RICKY GERVAIS, TY BURRELL, TINA FEY
Released 28 MARCH

FROM THE SWAMPS OF LOUISIANA TO A GRIM SIBERIAN GULAG, THE MUPPETS HAVE COME A LONG, LONG WAY IN 35 YEARS. THEIR LATEST IS A DELECTABLE, GAG-LADEN EURO PUDDING, AND IT MIGHT JUST BE A MUPPET MASTERPIECE.

cene: a bleak and blasted Siberian gulag. Tina Fey, decked out in glossy jackboots and elegantly tailored Russian guard's uniform, belts out a brassy, smartly choreographed production number espousing the manifold joys of centralised state funding. Meanwhile, a chorus of grey-faced inmates, including Ray Liotta, Danny Trejo and the big-boned one out of *Flight of the Conchords*, accompany her on doo-wop harmonies. A timid but big-hearted amphibious green sock-puppet looks on.

Is there anywhere else we could be but in a Muppet movie?



A Muppet movie. The very words spark up an inner warmth that's part cosy fireside glow and part unsupervised firework display. As joyous, psychotic and surreal as they are, the Muppets occupy a unique position in the cultural heartland. They exist in a nightmarish burlesque DMZ that shares Fuzzy-Felt borders with the Dadaist anarchy of Monty Python, the broad, rootsy experimentalism of The Beatles and the acid-baked iconoclasm of the Manson Family. But with more frogs and bears.

In fact, with those credentials, it's little wonder that Kermit and the gang fell slightly off the media map during the business-end of Reagan's go-go '80s and the dotcom '90s. At heart, the Muppets have always traded in '60s-style subversion and the chazzed-up, can-do euphoria of the '70s. Today, the hypercharged down-home banjo-wrangling of Mumford & Sons lord it over the pop charts. Weirdy-beards are ordering craft ale and hand-raised pork pies in pubs. Girls are knitting on the top decks of buses and spunky little shops/restaurants/crematoriums are blinking into life on every local high street. It would appear that a collective yen for tactile, homespun delights has returned. So re-start the (folksy) music, re-light the (candle) lights and unleash the inner Muppet that has lain dormant inside you for all these years.

Perversely, it isn't actually difficult to imagine a world in which the Muppets never existed — It's a Muppetful Life, if you like — but that is surely the point. It's just as easy to imagine a world without ketchup, bubble-bath or Australia — they're all just idle luxuries. They're all

"The Muppets exist in a nightmarish burlesque DMZ that shares Fuzzy-Felt borders with Monty Python, The Beatles and the Manson Family."

gifts we've given ourselves. But without pointless little treats like the Muppets to brighten up the dark Nietzschean corners of the abyss, man is no more than antic mud. It's called fun, and one look out of your window will confirm that it's a commodity that's currently in short supply. As humanity inexorably ascends toward the vast Googleapproved cloud of hive-mind statelessness that is surely its unnatural destiny, the Muppets are here to remind us to kick back, accentuate the positive vibes and make room for such insane and useless fripperies as rocket-assisted chickens, piano-playing dogs and ursine Jewish stand-ups. A pig in love with a frog? No problem. No-one's going to judge you here.

Quite simply, *Muppets Most Wanted* is unnecessary fun of the purest stripe. A souped-up volley of knockout gags, bizarro cameos, breakneck energy and unchecked mayhem all constellating around a freewheeling, globetrotting road movie, *Most Wanted* is easily the best Muppet film since the first Muppet Movie way, way back in 1979. It is, to appropriate that original film's sly tagline — more entertaining than humanly possible.



While 2011's *The Muppets* had an abundance of charm, it was also a somewhat belaboured re-introduction of old friends to a new audience. A necessary scene-setter and an enjoyable calling card, it did its job and everyone went home happy. Now, with everyone's baggage stowed away safely and all passports duly stamped, returning director James Bobin (a key creative alumnus of *Flight of the Conchords*) is free to trade on the enormous good will engendered by his first stint in charge of the menagerie, and finally let the Muppets completely off the chain.

Most Wanted picks up exactly where the previous film left off, with the closing bars of *The Muppets'* climactic end-credits sing-along still ringing in our ears. But when the music fades and the lights start to dim, Kermit and friends find themselves with little else to do but stand forlornly in the street and kick their heels while the sets are dismantled, the extras go home and the studio is cleared. The gang is back together, but they've got nowhere left to go.

Oozing into the void comes Ricky Gervais' suspect impresario Dominic Badguy (pronounced 'Bad-gee' - it's French, apparently) with an offer of a big-time world tour for which Kermit believes the Muppets are severely unprepared. Convincing himself that the show will come together on the road, Kermit reluctantly gives the green light and the Muppets head off on a purpose-built steam train. All, however, is not what it seems, as we discover when Constantine - a master thief and the world's most dangerous frog - escapes from prison in Siberia and swiftly assumes Kermit's identity. "Hello, my name is Kai-yearrr-ah-meet," he announces in a gloopy Russian accent that you'll be attempting to replicate as soon as you leave the cinema, if you aren't already trying.

With Kermie mistakenly thrown into Tina Fey's gulag (band name?) and the evil Constantine's laissez-faire attitude to showbiz allowing the Muppets to indulge their every artistic whim — including Gonzo's 'Indoor Running of the Bulls', Miss Piggy's Celine Dion fixation and Animal's superextended prog drum solos — the Muppets appear to be coming apart at the seams. Pun intended. And when Interpol suspects them of having pulled off a series of daring heists across Europe, the gig looks certain to be up. If only friendship and mutual co-operation could somehow save the day...

Of course none of this really matters. As with all road movies, it's the journey that counts, not the destination. Stick a pin in a map, pack a hamper and pack in the shits'n'giggles along the way. Here, the plot is consciously disregarded at every turn in favour of a sketch-based gallivant across Europe that affords unmissable opportunities for locally-sourced celebrity cameos such as Christoph Waltz dancing the waltz in Berlin and the fully-Mexican Salma Hayek hanging out with Gonzo in... Madrid.

Indeed, the Muppets treat Europe like a baby treats a nappy. Berlin is painted as a dank, cobbled Weimar ghetto, Spaniards are lazy, Brits are toffs, and the French — in the form of prissy Interpol agent called (zut alors!) Jean Pierre Napoleon — get it in the neck at every opportunity. Are the filmmakers perhaps spoofing American perceptions of Gallic life when they lampoon a caricature version of France made up of tiny electric cars, long, long lunch breaks and outdated Old World technologie? Or are they simply taking le piss?

As it rolls on, the film does tend to lose a smidgeon of its crackpot vitality, with some of the dance numbers feeling a little undernourished, the cameos becoming more and more careless and gags eventually taking a backseat to narrative. A shame, as the opening hour expends so much worthwhile energy reminding us that life does not necessarily conform to the peerlessly precise three-act narrative arc of, say, *Toy Story*, but is more usually a haphazard flurry of glorious bullshit experienced in the company of total and utter nitwits.

This is as close as *Most Wanted* comes to a life lesson. Kermit may tell the Muppets that they will learn something about "sharing or waiting your turn or the number three", but they don't. Not really. The main thing kids will take away is to at least try and notice if your best friend has been abducted and replaced with a murderous amphibian crimelord. And even then, don't judge him too harshly.

Because deep down we're all Muppets. We're all freaks, three-time losers, starry-eyed delusionals, busted hucksters, gonzo idiots, nearly men, luckless outcasts or some or another permutation of one or all of those. But we're also all part of one big dysfunctional global family now; a hot, formless, atomised mess of pokes and tweets and flashmob ennui, and the show, such as it is, must go on. Not with grit or fortitude or anything as aimless and dreary as keeping calm and carrying on, but with spangly costumes, pointless explosions, big band showtunes, bad jokes, Special Guest Stars and a porcine femme fatale.

We might not ever make our own rainbow connection, but we owe it to ourselves to have as much loud, dangerous and extravagant fun as possible along the way, because as Sigmund Freud almost put it, "Every normal person is, in fact, only normal on the average. His ego, in some part or other, approximates to that of a Muppet." ADAM LEE DAVIES

ANTICIPATION. The Muppets take on the world? There's only ever going to be one winner...

4

ENJOYMENT. Whether you check your cynicism at the door or cling to it like a life raft, you'll nonetheless be reduced to a strange, furry pool of lunatic happiness.

4

IN RETROSPECT. A berserker banquet of non-stop mayhem and unalloyed delight.

4

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WE WANT TO CELEBRATE THE BEST CULT AND INDEPENDENT TITLES FROM ALL ACROSS THE GLOBE, AND THESE SCREENINGS WILL ALL BE SUPERCHARGED WITH THE HELP OF ROVING LWLIES STAFF MEMBERS WHO WILL BE ON HAND TO OFFER CONTEXT, CRITIQUE AND CONSOLATION.

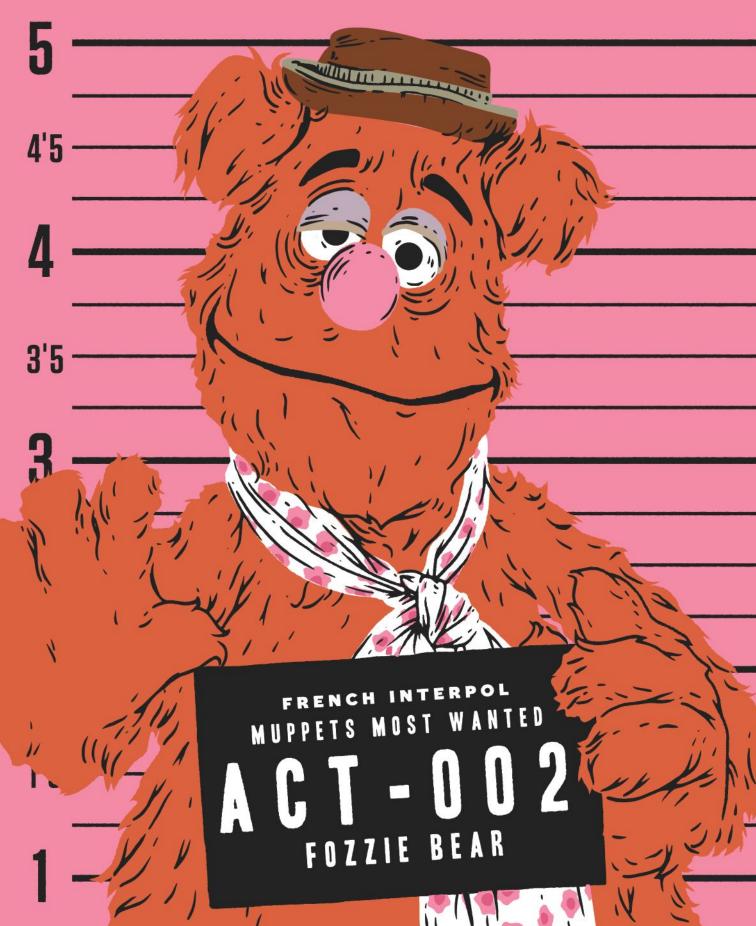
OUR NEXT FREE PREVIEW SCREENING WILL BE DAVID MACKENZIE'S BRUTAL AND BRILLIANT STARRED UP (REVIEWED PAGE 58) ON TUESDAY 18 MARCH AT THE LEEDS EVERYMAN CINEMA.

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FEATURES CONTENTS

14-16 GREEN ZONE: A KERMIT POP QUIZ

LWLies was granted an audience with the diminutive showbiz icon, and he talked James Bond, social networking and the meteoric rise of the ukelele.

17 - 21 FIFTY SHADES OF GREEN

The frog prince gets the *LWLies* biog treatment in this whistle-stop tour of a life as America's amphibian sweetheart.

24 - 25 HENSON'S EARLY YEARS: SAM AND FRIENDS

The show that helped Henson make his name as a puppeteer and comedian of rare esteem, the one that started the whole party.

26 - 27 HENSON'S EARLY YEARS: THE CUBE

A haunting, Kafka-esque vision of a man trapped inside a bizarre TV show formed the basis for one of Henson's disturbing short films.

28 - 29 HENSON'S EARLY YEARS: SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

One of Henson's early attempts to prove that his cute creatures weren't just for kids backfired spectacularly in front of primetime American TV audiences.

30 - 34 ECLECTIC MAYHEM: THE MUPPETS' GREATEST HITS

Tom Huddleston boils a musical back catalogue that skirts every style and genre imaginable (and inventing some new ones too) down to 28 classic cuts.

36 - 37 PIANO MAGIC: A CONVERSATION WITH BRET MCKENZIE

The Flight of the Conchords frontman-turned-Muppet music maestro tells *LWLies* about his fondness for doo-wop and yacht rock.

38 - 39 WOMAN OR MUPPET?

In the depths of a NYC toy store, Rebecca Ellis found a way to have herself cloned in Muppet form for the bargain price of \$100. This is her story.

40 - 44 1979

It was this hallowed year that saw the release of the *The Muppet Movie* in cinemas. In poster form, *LWLies* survey some of its biggest rival releases.



OUIZ SHEET

CANDIDATE NAME:

ANONYMOUS CANDIDATE CODE

HIS ROYAL GREENNESS TAKES TIME OUT TO ANSWER SOME OF LWLIES' MOST PRESSING QUESTIONS.

1. DO YOU LIKE TO READ THE REVIEWS OF THE MUPPET MOVIES? HAS THERE EVER BEEN A REVIEW YOU'VE BEEN PARTICULARLY PROUD OF?

I don't need to read the reviews, me've got those two old guys in the balcony, statler and Waldorf. They Provide real-time immediate reviews before, during and after we make a movie. So for, the only thing "The End". But, to tell you the fruth, other critics have been very kind to us, and I'm very proud when they say we're the best grog-pig-bear-whatever comedy musical entertainment in the world. It's a small micha, but it's ours.

2. WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING A FAN HAS EVER

A hair housh.



3. HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET TO GO BACK TO YOUR SWAMP ROOTS?

Whenever I'm not in Hollywood or on location smooting a movie, I'm in the swamp. Sometimes I swim hown by the roots, but us wally I just Hoat on the surface.

4. IN A RECENT TV SPECIAL, LADY GAGA WORE A JACKET MADE OF MINIATURE KERMIT DOLLS. HOW DID IT FEEL SEEING THAT?

I'm happy to report that no fregs were harmed in the Making of that Jacket . And I found out, they werent actually bolls, but several of my cousins who are hope Lody Gaga groupies. We frogs are a clingy bunch.

5. WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH RICKY GERVAIS? DID YOU GIVE EACH OTHER ANY ACTING ADVICE DURING THE SHOOT?

Ricky is softunary and nice. Every day he'd come on the set and he couldn't be lieve he was working with the Murrets. And we couldn't believe he showled upon set after what we did to him every day. As for acting advice, I suggested that he do more comantic scenes with Miss Piggy so I could get some time aft), and he suggested # to get about it.

6. WHEN YOU'RE ON-SET, WHAT FOOD/DRINKS DO YOU REQUEST FOR YOUR TRAILER?

Actually, Miss Piggy is in charge of making demands. And that pretty much takes up everybody's time. So I just be enjoy whatever food and drinks they're serving to the rest of the ast and crew. Although sometimes it t get hungry late in the afternoon, I'll send out for a large order of flics.

7. DO YOU FEEL THAT BEING FAMOUS NOW IS THE SAME AS BEING FAMOUS IN THE LATE '70S?

It's a lot harder being tamus now. The media is everywhere. The internet, twifter, Instagram, Facebook. .. In the 'To, I could walk down the street naked and no one would notice. (I'm a frog; It's what we do.) But now, they not only hotice. they take my picture, post it orline and ask who I'm NOT wearing.

8. HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MISS PIGGY IN ONE WORD?

INTERSPECTES



9. YOU GOT YOUR STAR ON THE HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME THE SAME YEAR AS MARTIN SCORSESE. HAVE YOU TWO TALKED ABOUT COLLABORATING AND WHAT WOULD YOUR IDEAL ROLE BE IN A SCORSESE FILM?

Marty is a legendary director and it would be an honour to appear in one of his films. The ideal role? A Boxing movie.





QUIZ SHEET

CANDIDATE NAME:

ANONYMOUS CANDIDATE CODE

10. HOW WOULD YOU HAVE PLAYED THE LEAD IN WOLF OF WALL STREET DIFFERENTLY?

I usually work naked but in that morie I would be worn more clother just fostend out from the root of the Cast.

11. WHAT WAS THE LAST MOVIE YOU SAW THAT MADE YOU CRY? (CAN FROGS CRY?)

Yes, frogs can Cry . (And dy con if piggy hits you hard enough.) Its for the last movie that made me cry - Saving Mr Bonks. Naturolly, I'm a big fun of Mary Poppins but the fale of making that movie - and P.L. Travers own story was so moving. Emma Thompson was amazing. and ton Hanks was great or walk Disney. If they make my life story, I want tom to play me.





16. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER GREEN PERFORMERS TRYING TO MAKE IT IN THE INDUSTRY?

15. DO YOU STILL PLAY THE BANJO? WHAT DO YOU

I do still play the banjo Practice every day,

Martin. I'm thrilled that the ukulele is a lit I love the sound if makes ... Plus it's afready groy - sized. Gotta Love that.

THINK OF THE RISE OF THE UKULELE?

Obviously, it's not easy being green. And sure, it might be nicer being red, yellow, or gold or something much more colourful like that. But it's important to be yourself, be true to who you are . This way, if you're lucky enough to make it, you'll recognize who that is tup there on stage. It's you.

12. WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE JAMES BOND MOVIE

I bred Skyfall. I walked around for days oftenuceds saying - "The name is Pond,

James Pond". In the Swamp, They change the name to appeal to amphibian demographic. But while I love all the Bond tilms, I greats Goldfinger is my all time forwarde. I Like it because it has the perfect mix of action, godgets, music, intrigue and style a the Miss Piggy likes it because it has gold.



13. WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING ANIMAL HAS EVER DONE? Taken accordion lesgons.



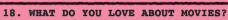
14. DO ANY OF THE MUPPETS ACTUALLY FIND FOZZIE'S JOKES FUNNY?

De course I love Fozzie's jokes . Oh sore, they want airen't always top flight a list Socko bago hilarious, But Fozzie delivers then with such enthusias an, gusto and worka-worka, you have to laugh. Also, his comedy makes you feel like a kid. Or as Fozzie Puts it: if you want to feel young, hang out with old jokes.



17. OF ALL THE MUPPET MOVIES, WHICH IS THE ONE YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

I'm very provid of Muppets Most Wanted out new movie. Its get all the great quest stacs, laughs music pigs, bears, togs and whatevers of our other movies - but with a turiest. A doppelgunger! A frog who levery body says I Looks the almost exactly like me. I think tolks are groing to love it. I hope so. Naturally, I'm proud or all our movies, but the one that's most important to me is our first, the Original The Muppel Movie. It's our stray, pretty much me, so it will always a socied blue in my heart. have aspecial place in my heart.



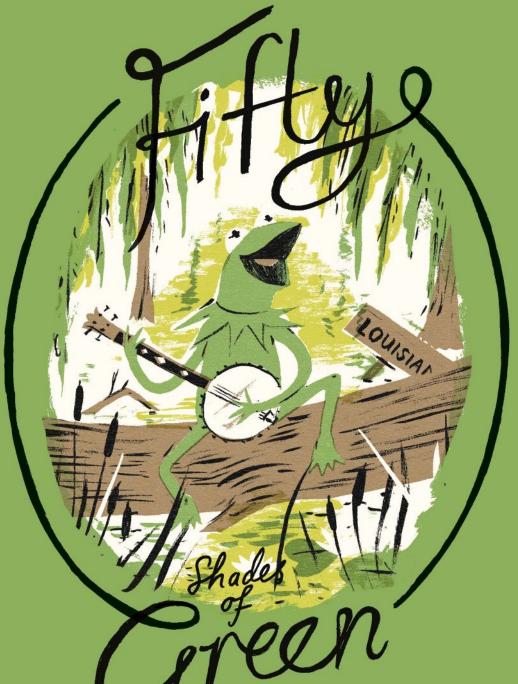
I'm short, so I usually get in for a kids ticket price. I'm kidding. I adore the movies. Theyre dreams you see with your eyes open. And the first time I saw a movie, I know puts what I wanted to do - to follow my dream and ead up on the big screen. And it that I ream can come the price of a little was the an anythin true for a falking trog like me, than anything is possible. Movies taught we that.



TOTAL SCORE: 500







Written by Adam Woodward Mustration by Micholas John Frith The antrage lifespan of a frog is said to be around five to o six years. Puppeteer, cartomist, filmmaker and all-round bearded legend, Jim Henson, managed to find one whose 60th birthday is just over the horizon. LWLIES Looks back at 50 Momentaus events in the life of Kermit T. Frog.

1955 - Remit is born in a swamp somewhere in America's Deep South His exact birthplace is unknown, although it is thought to be somewherein Louisiana.

9 May, 1955 - Kernit makes his (small) Screen debut on SAM AND FRIENDS. The blackand-white family sketch show marks Jim Henson's first collaboration with his future wife Jane Nebel.

11 May, 1955 - Kermit demonstrates his aptitude on the banjo for the first time while lip-synching to a recording of 'A Hobse Named Bill' in the SAM AND FRIENDS episode of the same name.

October, 1956-Remit Makes
his first of Many guest
appearances on TONIGHT! (which
would later become THE TONIGHT
SHOW), performing a version of
'I've Grown Accustomed to Your
face' while dressed in drag.



15 December, 1961-Kermit and his co-stars bid a fond farewell to audiences in the final broadcast episode of SAM AND FRIENDS.

1962-Rowlf the Dog, Kermit's close friend and the first Muppet to achieve national fame, makes his first screen outing in a series of Purina Dog Chow adverts for American TV.

31 December, 1965 - During an appearance on THE TONIGHT SHOW, host Johnny Carson makes the first public reference to "KERMITTHE FROG!"

22 January, 1969 - Jim Henson Films a promotional pitch neel for a show he calls SESAMESTREET.

16 March, 1969 - Remit gains his icenic fringed collar for the howlong TV special, HEY, CINDERELLA!.

M

10 November, 1969-SESAME
STREET premieres on the
National Education
Television network, with
Kemiet making an appearance
to deliver a lecture on the
Letter W.

10 March, 1970 - Kennit sings Personal anthem, 'Bein'Green,' on air for the first time.

1970-19.76-Kernit enters his awkward New (oke phase, sporting a double collar in several early seasons of SESAME STREET.

September 1970 - Reports begin to circulate that Kernit is to be dropped from SESAME STREET for being "too commercial".

1971-Kermit makes his first appearance as a TV-news Correspondent.

12 May, 1971-Kermit hits fullyfledged froghood in THE FROG PRINCE, an hour long episode of the TALES FROM MUPPETLAND series.

13 October, 1974 -Kennit's Long-term Love interest, Miss Piggy, Makes her debut in TV Marie HERB ALPERT AND THE TJB.

16 November, 1974-Kermit dans a cowbay hat on the popular US games how WHAT'S MY LINE?

10-16 December, 1974 Buoyed by SESAME STREET'S
Success but frustrated at
being branded a Kid's act,
Henson shoots a pilot for
THE MUPPET SHOW: SEX AND VIOLENCE
for ABC. The network
ultimately passes on the show.

5 September, 1976 - A new formula of THE MUPPET SHOW belatedly hits TV Screens, Catapulting its host Kermit and new east members Fozzie Bear, Miss Piggy, Gorzo and Animal to Stardan.

12 May, 1979 - Kermit turns insto a chicken following an outbreak of "Cluckitis" on THE MUPPET SHOW.

22 June, 1979-Kemit and co make their big screen debut in THE MUPPET MOVIE.

The film becomes the Seventh highest grossing film of the year.

1980 - Kermit's Laidback banjo Lament, "The Rainbow Connection", is naminated for an Academy Award.

15 Navember, 1980 - Kermit dramatically-fines Miss Pizzy from THE MUPPET SHOW, temporarily replacing her with human guest star Loretta Swit.

> 15 March, 1981-Five years and 120 episodes after making its premiere THE MUPPET SHOW airs for the Last time. The future of Kermit and his fellow Muppets is unclear.

26 June, 1981 - The Muppets get a feature-length sequel in the form of THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER. Kermit and Fozzie star as twin brothers / investigative reporters.

Summer 1983 - Kernit appears as Luke Skywalker on the Cover of MUPPET MAGAZINE #3. The issue features an interview with Isaac Asimov by Dr. Julius Strangepork.

13 July, 1984-THE MUPPETS
TAKE MANHATTAN hits
Cinemas. A newly graduated
Hermit and the rest of The
Muppets head to New York
with the hope of making
it on Broadway.

15 September, 1984 -Kermit voices a younger version of himself in the Long-running animated series MUPPET BABIES.

May 1985 - MUPPET BABIES
gets a bi-Monthly comic book
which puts out 26 usues
before retiring in 1989 - German
and Mexican versions titled
DIE MUPPET BABIES and Los
PEQUEÑOS MUPPETS are later
Published

4 May, 1990 - Henson and Kermit appear live together for the Last time on THE ARSENIO HALL SHOW to promote The Muppets at Walt Disney World.

6 May, 1990 - Kernit dresses up as Indiana Jones in the Indiana Jones in the Indiana Jones stunt Show at walt Disney World.

16 May, 1990 - Kermit and the rest of the world mourns the tragic loss of Jim Henson, after he succumbs to a rare bacterial infection.

21 November, 1990 - Kermit thanks viewers for their support during a musical finale to THE MUPPETS CELEBRATE JIM HENSON, Signing off, "That's the way the boss would've wanted it."

11 December, 1992-The Muppets do Dickens in THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL, with Kermit taking a less glamourus vole as Bob Cratchit, loyal employee to Ebenezer Scrooge (Michael Caine)



19 January 1993-Kennik takes Part in Bill Clinton's first Presidential Inauguration festivities.

1 November, 1993 - Kermit publishes
One frog can Make a Difference: Kermit's
Guide to Life in the '90s, a self-help
Parody.

27 September, 1994-Kermit releases 'Kermit Unpigged', the last album released on the Jim Henson Records Label.

15 February, 1996 - Kermit stars as Captain Smollett alongside
Tim Curry and Kerni Bishop in
MUPPET TREASURE ISLAND, a
feature-length adaptation
of Robert louis Sterenson's
Classic Novel

March 1996 - in New Zealand a 21-year-old Man bursts into a radio station, taking the manager hostage and demanding that IThe Rainban Connection' be played.

8 March, 1996-A short-lived TV revival, MUPPETS TONIGHT premieres.

19 May, 1996 - Kermit is awarded an horoway doctorate of Amphibious Letters at Southampton College, New York.

> 1998-Kernit gets into costume as The Kerminator for an allstar Muppet Parodics Calender.

14 July, 1999 - Kemit helps Gonzo Reunite with his extranged extraterrestrial family in MUPPETS FROM SPACE.

6 October, 2001-Kermit and Kylie Minogue perform a duet of Especially for You'on UK television.

8-9 December, 2001-Muppetfest, a two-day fan Convention, is held in Santa Monica, California.

14 November, 2002 - Kermit receives a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The star is Located at 6801 Hollywood Blvd.

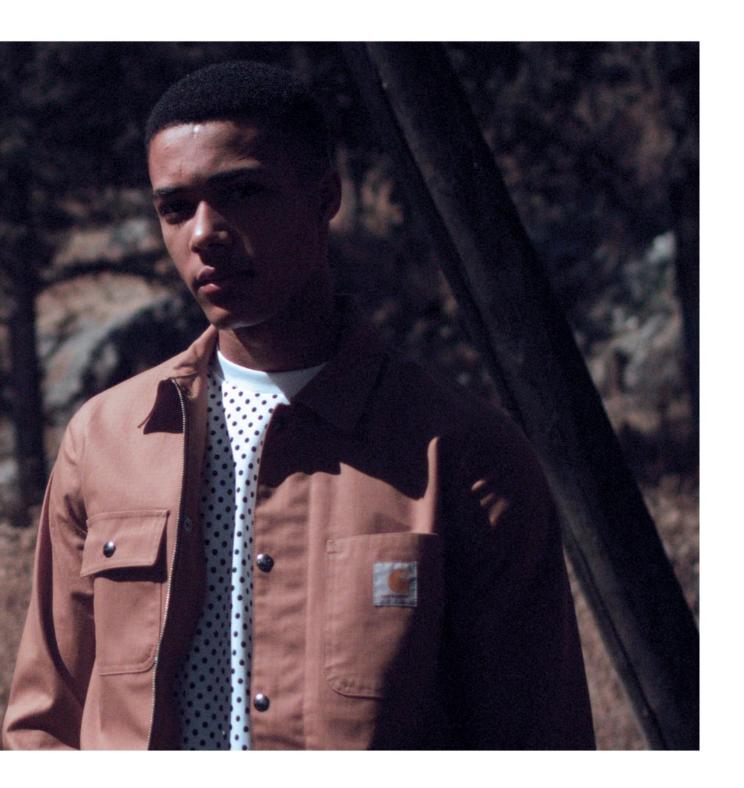
> 22 September, 2003-A Jim Henson Memorial also featuring Kermit is unveiled at Henson's alma mater, the University of Maryland.

2005 - Kermit turns 50.

23 November, 2011-The Muppets make a triumphank big, screen cameback in THE MUPPETS, with Kermit and co rallying, to save the legendary Muppet Theater.











HENSON'S EARLY YEARS

SAM AND FRIENDS

WORDS BY ASHLEY CLARK. ILLUSTRATION BY ELIOT WYATT

WAS THERE LIFE BEFORE THE MUPPETS? LWLIES FINDS SUBVERSIVE, SELF-REFLEXIVE LAUGHS ON LOCAL TEA-TIME TV WITH BIG JIM'S SAM AND FRIENDS.

or the world of puppetry — and entertainment at large — it could have been so different. "In school I didn't take puppetry seriously," Jim Henson once told an interviewer, "It didn't seem like the sort of thing a grown man works at for a living." Fortunately that changed when Henson, then a university freshman, was offered the chance to create a five-minute puppet show entitled Sam and Friends for WRC-TV, Washington, DC's NBC affiliate.

It ran for six years between 1955 and 1961 and became hugely popular, winning an Emmy Award for Best Local Entertainment Program in 1959. Henson needn't have worried about being taken seriously, either: by the late '50s, when the average college student was making minimum wage in menial jobs, Henson was raking in \$5,200 a year to perform on TV. Most importantly, with *Sam and Friends*, Henson grasped a valuable opportunity to develop his skills and singular wit before becoming a major presence on the national stage.

Sam and Friends coincided with the rise in popularity of television, and Henson was fascinated by the possibilities offered by the still-fledgling medium. Though television puppetry existed in the mid-'50s, it looked stuffy and stilted, consisting of little more than filmed puppet shows with blocky characters (consider Britain's contemporaneous *Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men* for contrast).

With his first show, Henson wanted to dispense with visible strings, and elevate TV puppetry to an illusory art form. He twigged there was no need to hide the performers provided they were out of camera range, and pioneered the technique of simultaneously watching the action on a monitor and performing. This enabled the puppets to be filmed just like actors in films or live action TV (including close-ups), and meant that the frame could be rigorously controlled to complement the action. Henson's intelligent use of the frame - canny manipulation of depth of field; a surprise edit from a closeup to wide shot to reveal that a potential shootout between muppets is actually a harmless game of chess — can be seen clearly in the surviving episodes, a few of which are available on YouTube. When one considers the eventual formal diversity of the Hensonian empire (film, stage, actor integration, 3D) such trailblazing hardly seems surprising.

In order to make visually attractive puppets with expressiveness and sensitivity, Henson crafted his Sam and

Friends characters from flexible, fabric-covered foam rubber. It's clear that these characters were forerunners of Henson's beloved Muppets. The eponymous Sam (a bald humanoid with a boxer's nose) is something of an outlier, but others are easier to pinpoint. The rotund creature Mushmellon bears a striking resemblance to Oscar the Grouch, while the consumptive growler Yorick is an obvious precursor to Cookie Monster. However, the most notable character is the only one who would graduate to full-time Muppethood: Kermit, then blue instead of green, and more of a lizard than a frog.

Also notable in Sam and Friends are early signs of Henson's trademark brand of sweet, antic, and layered comedy, which would appeal equally to adults and children. Early episodes mainly featured the characters lip-synching to popular songs (often deliberately badly for comic effect), but later ones relied more on wordplay and the vocal talents of Henson and his future wife Jane. The jokes are often satirically referential of contemporary pop culture — one episode, 'Powder Burn', is a riff on TV western Gunsmoke — and this topical approach would one day be seen in the likes of Sesame Street, and non-Henson family shows like The Simpsons.

Sam and Friends' humour could also be dazzlingly esoteric. The episode 'Visual Thinking' features Kermit and Harry the Hipster, a black-polo-necked Beat poet creature, attempting 'image visualisation' — conjuring images by simply dreaming them up. The louche Harry uses jazz scatting to make scrawled, thought-bubble images appear on the screen, which he can only erase by scatting backwards (achieved here by tape backmasking, as heard on The Beatles' trippy song 'Tomorrow Never Knows'). But an increasingly panicked Harry can't remember what he's been scatting, and his frenzied attempts to backtrack only add to the scrawls on the screen, which eventually engulf the characters. The sketch is funny, but it's also unexpectedly haunting: a satire of artistic pretension and, perhaps, the the deleterious effects of too many drugs?

It's safe to say that despite its widespread popularity, this was daring stuff. And in *Sam and Friends'* final episode in December '61, Henson had his furry characters nihilistically blow up the set with dynamite. With a move to New York on the cards and the Muppets Inc. company by now established, this was the confident act of a man who knew he was only getting started. It was time for bigger, better and altogether Muppetier things ?



HENSON'S EARLY YEARS

THE CUBE

WORDS BY BUDD WILKINS. ILLUSTRATION BY ELIOT WYATT

THE MUPPET MAN'S ACID-FRAZZLED EARLY TV WORK SHOWCASED HIS FONDNESS FOR HOPE-SAPPING PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE AND LUIS BUÑUEL.

he Cube, a medium-length experimental film directed by Jim Henson, was broadcast in February 1969 as an episode of NBC Experiment in Television, an avowedly avant-garde program for which Henson had produced an earlier episode entitled Youth 68, a self-styled "collage" exploring the values and viewpoints of the youth movement. Both works belong to a period when Henson and frequent co-writer Jerry Juhl were experiencing a surge of imagination (not unlike the ferment of the counterculture) that saw them creating new Muppet characters and family-friendly projects as well as more sophisticated, intellectually ambitious projects like Time Piece (Henson's Oscar-nominated live action short) and Tale of Sand, originally a script for a feature-length film that was eventually adapted into a graphic novel in 2011.

The Cube is tonally darker than the relatively featherweight humour associated with Muppets-related projects, although its reflexive aspects find a faint echo in the characters Statler and Waldorf, whose ill-humoured heckling offered snarky meta-commentary on The Muppet Show. Time Piece was similarly fixated on issues of mortality and meaning. Henson's mature works, with their exploration of themes involving alienation and intellectual entrapment, can arguably be linked to the philosophical idealism of Christian Science, the religion in which he was raised.

The film opens with an extreme close-up of the protagonist, referred to only as 'Man in the Cube' (Richard Schaal), staring into the camera eye. He finds himself inexplicably entrapped in an all-white environment, a claustrophobic space regularly subdivided into smaller squares from which there seems to be (as Sartre would phrase it) "no exit". The Cube certainly plays like a piece of existential theatre, flagrantly absurdist in Camus' sense of the word. The cavalcade of outrageous characters who pass in and out of the Cube, taunting the Man with a variety of possible explanations (not to mention opportunities for escape) that turn out to be nothing more than psych-outs and red herrings, prove Sartre's axiom that hell is other people.

Moreover, the script's emphasis on "finding your own door" in order to exit the Cube recalls Kafka's parable 'Before the Law' (later embedded in his novel 'The Trial') in which a supplicant spends his whole life camped out before the one door that can admit him to the law without ever passing through it. Both 'The Trial' and *The Cube* feature an everyman protagonist

who struggles to discern the contours of his own confinement.

The first hypothesis offered to explain the Man's predicament is revealing. A woman claiming to be his mother-in-law (Alice Hill), whom he does not recognise, asks simply, "What's the matter with him? Drugs?" This suggestion undoubtedly resonated with the counterculture Zeitgeist: a popular way to consume LSD was to ingest acid-laced sugar cubes, a fact referred to in the title of *The big Cube*, a 1969 film starring Lana Turner. The similarity in titles may not be entirely coincidental, especially when you consider that the look of the Cube (as well as the abrupt appearance and disappearance of its furnishings) recalls the "Beyond the Infinite" sequence in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Such parallels don't prove any sort of causality; they're merely intriguing echoes of potentially similar sensibilities.

The Cube is an intriguingly self-reflexive work, a quality best illustrated in the conversation between the Man and a pompous Professor (Don McGill). "This is all a very complex discussion of reality versus illusion," the Professor informs him. "The perfect subject for the television medium!" The Man understandably reacts with a certain amount of incredulity, but the Professor reassures him that things will work out, because TV programmes always end happily. To prove his point, the Professor wheels in a TV set so they can preview the broadcast's ending. The Man on the television, however, complains about the denouement: the situation may look upbeat, since he gets the girl in the end, yet he finds himself somehow discontent.

The Cube did not end happily. In fact, the ending repeats an ominous refrain first heard during the segment featuring a folk band, when their apparently impromptu performance of "You'll Never Get Out of Here" proves to be prerecorded, the needle skipping repeatedly on the phrase "until you're dead, dead, dead," while the musicians pack up their instruments and leave. Toying with the conventions of sound synchronisation is another recurring aspect of The Cube, as is the later cocktail party scene where various guests complain about The Cube as narrative: lamenting the lack of a clear plot and expressing dissatisfaction with the ending. This sequence in particular is strongly reminiscent of Luis Buñuel's The Exterminating Angel with its bourgeois dinner party condemned to enigmatic confinement in a single room (A)



HENSON'S EARLY YEARS

SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

WORDS BY THIRZA WAKEFIELD. ILLUSTRATION BY ELIOT WYATT

WANT TO HEAR THE STORY OF JIM HENSON'S DISASTROUS ATTEMPTS AT GETTING DOWN AND DIRTY WITH THE SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE CREW IN THE LATE '70S?

975 got off to a bad start for Jim Henson. Two pilots — aimed at convincing US TV networks that the Muppets could appeal to adults as well as kids — bombed when they aired on ABS in March. Still, Sesame Street was in its sixth year, and the success of Sam and Friends had ensured that Henson's furry creations were staple guests on prime-time talks shows. But Henson remained convinced that his puppet-ensemble could thrive as well as any pomaded host in that highly desired slot. That year's standalone — entitled The Muppet Show: Sex and Violence — suggested otherwise, and ABC opted out.

At the end of that year, British financier and impresario Lew Grade offered to put up the cash for Henson's mad-eyed variety show. *The Muppet Show*, as it became known, would run until '8I, enjoyed by adults and children worldwide. That summer, however, another show prepared to air for the first time. It would be young, hip, irreverent; there was hype. Its producer, Lorne Michaels, had scooped up a youthful cooperative of talented comedians, fishing some of his impersonator-cast from the recently-folded *The Lampoon Radio Hour* — including Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, Gilda Radner and Chevy Chase. This was *Saturday Night Live*, and from the very first episode, broadcast on II October, the show had all of North America glued to the tube with its late night, lunatic spoofing.

Enter Henson. No, really. It sounds as absurd as the bard's famed stage direction, 'Exit, pursued by a bear.' (It's not known whether Shakespeare had an actual bear or costumed-actor chase Antigonus into the wings during I7th-century productions. Or a prototype Fozzie, for that matter.) Henson saw in *SNL* an opportunity to workshop a shadier side of the Muppets, suitable for more mature audiences. It's hard to believe he persuaded its creators to make room for something so Old Familiar within their proudly pioneering and offbeat comedy format. But he did, and was given a returning slot of a few minutes per episode.

For the purpose, Henson custom made a new family of Muppets and designed a diorama-set in which to house them. He called it 'The Land of Gorch': a sulphurous, pustular landscape on an unfamiliar planet, home to King Ploobis, his Queen and son and royal servants, Scred and Vazh. Unlike the pettable Kermit and Rowlf the Dog, these puppets were ratty, scaled and snaggletoothed. Prince Wisss had a

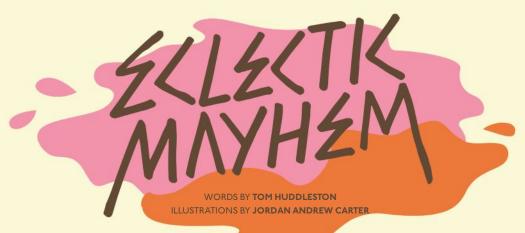
whiskery proboscis. Bobbing in and out the tundra (no Music Trees grew here), these childproof puppets spoke state-of-thenation commentary, cursed taxation and the contemporary political climate, humped each other in the cratered moraine, and consulted the all-seeing stone (really, foam) idol, The Mighty Favog. So where did it all go wrong?

To begin with, the task of scripting the skit fell not to Henson and his writing team, but to staff writers on the show. This was bothersome for both parties: for Henson, because each puppet had a sewn-in, predetermined character that had to be understood before it was written for; for the writers, usually juniors, who believed their moment in the sun was being wasted on alphabet teaching-aids. ("I won't write for felt!" jibed head writer Michael O'Donoghue.)

No one wanted to do it. By episode seven, the growing enmity for 'The Land of Gorch' had percolated into the script. It became an in-joke, with characters talking openly about their unpopularity and rumoured cancellation of their show-withina-show. Episode 13 saw Ploobis and Scred plead with actor Anthony Perkins to help them regain their jobs. This was an insidious sort of humiliation, working, like a tapeworm, from the inside out. To make matters worse, the majority of SNL performers couldn't or wouldn't get on board with the act. Only Chevy Chase, who wrote one of the sketches, and guest-host Lily Tomlin, appeared to more-than-tolerate their tactile co-stars. In one endcredit sequence, Belushi can be seen to remove a flick knife from his pocket and wave it, with murderous intent, at Ploobis.

The yaw of this abuse was felt beneath the waist: Frank Oz, earnest Jerry Nelson and the great Jim Henson himself heard it all. None could pretend the gig had worked out. In their third-to-last appearance, the Muppets pack themselves into a steamer trunk. "You're puppets," says Favog, "you have no feelings." Henson wrote that sketch. When the show was finally syndicated, all but one of the sketches were cut: only the 'I Got You Babe' duet between Scred and Tomlin remained in the edited re-run. In such an environment — ridiculed, ignored, backed into a corner — the Muppets were soulless as a windsock, and even less watchable. Happily for Henson, the curtain was poised to lift on The Muppet Theater. Thanks to Lew Grade, Kermit hosted his first show the following year, and there would come a time when the world's greatest stars would flock to his synthetic arms (A)





LWLIES CURATES THE PERFECT PLAYLIST FOR ANY AND ALL YOUR MUPPET MUSIC NEEDS. AND WE WOULD LIKE TO REMIND READERS AT THIS JUNCTURE: NOTHING IN THIS FEATURE HAS BEEN INVENTED.

oming to terms with the Muppets' recorded output can be a daunting task. With at least 25 LPs on the shelves, they challenge the likes of The Wombles and The Fall for sheer profligacy, while their revolving line-up, genre-hopping stylistic restlessness and staggering technical proficiency makes it impossible to know what they'll emerge with next — a beach party album? An EP of music hall classics? An exercise record?

Like so many other artists who rose to prominence in the heady days of punk, the Muppets hit their peak in the years 1977-79 and fell from grace in the '80s and '90s, before an unexpected return to form brought them screaming back into our hearts. And so, for anyone who's ever posed the question 'is there life beyond "Mahna Mahna"?', we present the ultimate CD-burnable, Spotify-playlistable guide to The Muppets on record. Animal, hit it!

STEREAU WARMUP

FROM: MISS PIGGY'S AEROBIQUE EXERCISE WORKOUT ALBUM (1982)
FEAT. MISS PIGGY

We set the stage with the opening track from Miss Piggy's only solo outing to date, precision-built to cash in on the Jane Fondainspired gymnastics craze. Perfect for the hi-fi fetishists among us, it's a funky knob-twiddling tune-up for your stereo system. Hey Piggy, nice action!

THE MUPPET SHOW THEME

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEAT. THE CAST

Where else to begin? The Muppets' first — and still their best — LP opens with that timeless theme, a rousing music hall cacophony sparking Proustian memories of lukewarm Sunday roasts, slapdash maths homework and blessed relief that the football's finally finished.

LIFE'S A HAPPY SONG

FROM: THE MUPPETS SOUNDTRACK (2012)
FEAT. JASON SEGEL, AMY ADAMS, MICKEY ROONEY AND OTHERS

Leaping forward three-and-a-half decades, here's the first major musical number from Jason Segel and Nicholas Stoller's triumphant Muppet revival. Featuring the star on lead vocals and penned by Flight of the Conchords piano man Bret McKenzie, it's a loopy sugar-rush of a song, announcing in no uncertain terms that these furry mothers were open for business.

MAHNA MAHNA

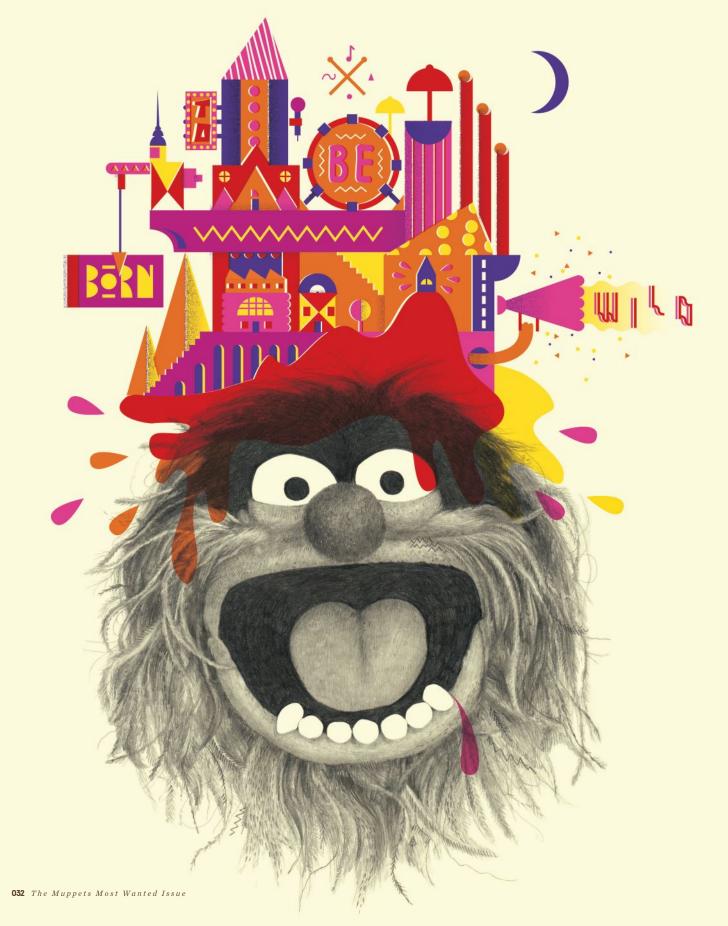
FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEAT. LULLABY OF BIRDLAND

Aka, the hit. As freaky fact fans will know, 'Mahna Mahna' was originally written for a 1968 documentary, *Sweden: Heaven and Hell*, exploring the seediest aspects of Scandinavian living from lesbianism to suicide. It was first performed by Henson's creations on *Sesame Street* as early as 1969, followed by performances on *The Johnny Carson Show, This is Tom Jones!* and one-off Hawnfronted TV special, *Pure Goldie*, in 1971. A fusion of burbling Eurojazz-pop, wild scat and general idiocy, the song has been translated into Hebrew and Arabic, reinvented in moog, disco and thrash metal versions, and formed the basis for Vanilla's groundbreaking pop smash 'No Way, No Way' in 1997.

BEIN' GREEN

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEAT. KERMIT

The sweetest song in the whole Muppet canon, 'Bein' Green' is partly a paean to racial harmony and partly a hymn to the joys of just, y'know, being happy with who you are. Muppet creator Jim Henson's vocals are a thing of hushed beauty, at once hesitant, prideful and heartbreakingly intimate.



FROGS

FROM: THE FROG PRINCE (1971)
FEAT. KERMIT

Going right back to where it all started, 'Frogs' is taken from the very first Henson LP, an audio adaptation of his Kermit-centric TV special *The Frog Prince*. It's another simple celebration of amphibious joy.

GOING CAMPING

FROM: ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY (1983)
FEAT. JOHN DENVER AND THE CAST

Bob Dylan had Joan Baez. Elton John had Kiki Dee. And the Muppets had John Denver: their most consistent and rewarding collaborator. This ode to the great outdoors features the first appearance on this list of the Muppets' favourite accompanying instrument: the banjo. Also, listen out for spectacular backing vocals from Animal.

MISSISSIPPI MUD

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEAT. THE GOGOLALA JUBILEE JUGBAND

More banjo! This hi-octane thrash-grass hoedown finds the gang at their most free-spirited, on a breathless sprint through the Deep South.

HAPPINESS HOTEL

FROM: THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER SOUNDTRACK (1981)
FEAT. POPS. SCOOTER AND THE CAST

Banjo No. 3. The musical highlight from the Muppets' sophomore big-screen outing finds Kermit pitching up at a fleabitten hotel staffed by a motley array of human and animal oddities. It's a chirpy, upbeat number crammed with memorable wordplay.

AN EDITORIAL BY SAM THE EAGLE

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM TWO (1978)
FEAT. SAM THE EAGLE

A brief moment of gravity. It's easy to forget that the Muppets were never just a jolly bunch of felted fools, they were a fuzzy bullet aimed right at the heart of the establishment. Here we have that upstanding pillar of conservative right-thinkingness, Sam the American Eagle, warning listeners of the perils of nudity, even when wearing clothes. If the show were on today, we have to assume that Sam would be reinvented as a fair and balanced Fox.

BABY FACE

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM 2 (1978)
FEAT. THE MUPPET CHICKENS

Yes, it's a flock of chickens squawking their way through the classic vaudeville number — if you have a problem with that, you're in the wrong place, friend. As an added bonus, the track opens with perhaps the greatest gag in vinyl history. Right, record?

THE GREAT GONZO EATS A RUBBER TYRE TO THE FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEAT. GONZO AND THE MUPPET ORCHESTRA

The title says it all, really: the orchestra strikes up, and one of the most astonishing feats of physical endurance gets underway. You can't see it, obviously, but it's definitely happening.

I'M GOING TO GO BACK THERE SOMEDAY

FROM: THE MUPPET MOVIE SOUNDTRACK (1979)
FEAT. THE GREAT GONZO

Gonzo in a more reflective mood, with one of those heart-onsleeve ballads that the Muppets do better than anyone this side of Gilbert O'Sullivan. Anyone who's ever left anywhere and felt quite sad about it may need to prepare themselves.

CUENTO LE GUSTA

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM 2 (1978)
FEAT. MISS PIGGY AND THE PIGS

In her first feature performance since we opened, Piggy shakes her porcine posterior with this spicy slice of south-of-the-border samba. Jennifer Lopez, eat your heart out.

CABIN FEVER

FROM: THE MUPPETS TREASURE ISLAND (1996)
FEAT. THE MUPPET SAILORS

More Latin flavours, this time with an added tropicalia twist. By the time of *Muppet Treasure Island* the Muppets were going through the motions, but this slightly tasteless ode to maritime mania is a highlight.

TIME IN A BOTTLE

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM 2 (1978)
FEAT. THE ELDERLY SCIENTIST

Arguably the most striking song on this list, and a reminder of just how jolting and off-message *The Muppet Show* could get. Halfway through a classic episode, the scene cuts to an aged, weary man shuffling around a lab filled with bubbling beakers, who proceeds to pine his way through Jim Croce's devastating ballad of ageing and loss. Listen hard, and you can just about hear the young(er) Tom Waits frantically scribbling notes.

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

FROM: OL' BROWN EARS IS BACK (1996)
FEAT. ROWLF

In the mid-'90s, the Henson Recording Company tried to stave off irrelevance by issuing a series of Muppet-themed concept LPs, including the unlistenable 'Muppet Beach Party', the dubious 'Kermit Unpigged' (more of which later), and a solo album in the

Tony Bennett style by resident piano man, Rowlf. This lush cover of Billy Joel's hit is the highlight of a generally pleasing, if hardly Zeitgeist-grabbing album.

MAN OR MUPPET

FROM: THE MUPPETS SOUNDTRACK (2012)
FEAT. JASON SEGEL AND WALTER

Another big-time power ballad from Bret McKenzie, and the song that finally made the words 'Academy Award winners The Muppets' a reality.

A GYPSY'S VIOLIN

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM 2 (1978)
FEAT. PETER SELLERS AND THE GYPSIES

One of the most unusual, amusing and racially dubious celebrity duets in the Muppet canon, this creaky old Vaudeville number comes alive thanks to the inimitable Peter Sellers, no stranger to the comedy singalong. Perhaps its ideas of what constitutes a gypsy are pretty ropey in these PC times, but try to set all that aside.

MR BASSMAN

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEAT. SCOOTER WITH DR TEETH AND THE ELECTRIC MAYHEM

Another ode to an instrument, and the hot-damn-funkiest song on this list. It features lead vocals from everyone's favourite jolly, orange, slightly forgettable sidekick Scooter, ably backed by the sonorous deep love of Dr Teeth's resident freakout king Floyd Pepper. And there'll be much more from the Teeth later, of course.

WAITING AT THE CHURCH

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOE MUSIC HALL EP (1977) FEAT. MISS PIGGY, KERMIT AND FOZZIE

Another odd but somehow appropriate addition to the Muppet discography was a UK-only 4-track EP of music hall favourites featuring Piggy on lead vocals. The single fared pretty well, hitting number 27 in a week that saw 'Mull of Kintyre' at the top spot, with Jonathan Richman's 'Egyptian Reggae' at number nine. High times.

FOZZIWIG'S WEDDING

FROM: THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL SOUNDTRACK (1992)
FEAT. DR TEETH AND THE ELECTRIC MAYHEM, PLUS ORCHESTRA

A gentle transition into the headbanging section of our playlist. This is a cut from the otherwise undistinguished *Christmas Carol* soundtrack (the film's great, just not the songs), in which a Dickensian chamber orchestra are cruelly mugged by the Muppets' resident rock heroes, Dr Teeth and the Electric Mayhem.

TENDERLY

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM (1977)
FEATURING: DR TEETH AND THE ELECTRIC MAYHEM

In which the fuzziest, scuzziest freaks on the planet take a gentle jazz standard out behind the studio and give it a damn good kicking.

NIGHT LIFE

FROM: THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER SOUNDTRACK (1981)
FEAT. DR TEETH AND THE ELECTRIC MAYHEM

More Dr Teeth, this time rockin' the top off a double decker bus as the gang step in out of *The Great Muppet Caper*. Perhaps the edge is starting to come off, but there's still lead in this punk pencil.

YOU CAN'T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER

FROM: THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN SOUNDTRACK (1984)
FEAT. DR TEETH AND THE ELECTRIC MAYHEM

Our final selection from Dr Teeth, and the only memorable track from 1984 misfire *The Muppets Take Manhattan*. Like many other great rockers of the era, the Mayhem have invested in a synthesiser and some 'soulful' backing vocalists. And the result sounds unnervingly like mid-'80s Leonard Cohen.

BORN TO BE WILD

FROM: KERMIT UNPIGGED (1994)
FEAT. OZZY OSBOURNE AND MISS PIGGY

One last chance to rock out, as Piggy hooks up with pre-reality-fame Ozzy for a ramshackle bolt through Steppenwolf's riotous road ode. The rest of the 'Kermit Unpigged' album consists of awkward celebrity cameos invariably introduced with, 'Hey, it's our old friend (Jimmy Buffett/Don Henley/misc washed-up AOR legend)', and is pretty near unlistenable.

PICTURES IN MY HEAD

FROM: THE MUPPETS SOUNDTRACK (2012)
FEAT. KERMIT AND THE CAST

The most heartrending song written for the recent reboot, this is a nostalgia bullet right to the heart. From the cold confines of his Hollywood mansion, Kermit wonders if he could ever get the old gang back together. He does, of course.

THE RAINBOW CONNECTION

FROM: THE MUPPET MOVIE SOUNDTRACK (1979)
FEAT. KERMIT

A swirl of strings, a gently plucked banjo and the voice of a simple everyfrog summing up the hippie dream in just over three minutes. The melody soars, the lyrics are dreamy and metaphysical, and Henson's vocal is, as ever, just imperfectly perfect. We're still searching, Jim.

THE MUPPETS CLOSING THEME

FROM: THE MUPPET SHOW ALBUM 2 (1978)
FEAT. THE CAST

A booming, footstomping New Orleans funeral band take on the theme to play us out. The track ends with a little dash of Statler and Waldorf, a team farewell and perhaps the most haunting locked groove in the history of vinyl. Somewhere there's an empty house where Fozzie howls on a loop, forever...

Head to littlewhitelies.co.uk for our full Muppet Spotify playlist.





"ASTONISHING Johansson is nothing short of iconic"

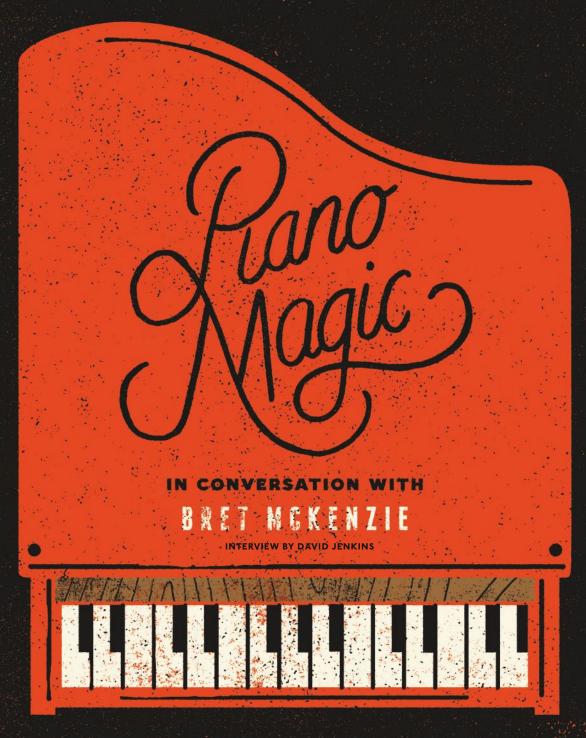


A FILM BY Jonathan Glazer

Scarlett Johansson

THESK

IN CINEMAS MARCH 14T



NEW ZEALAND'S FAVOURITE SON RETURNED HOME A NATIONAL HERO AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE MUPPETS HOST.

WANTED, ARE EVEN BETTER, SO IS HE ABOUT TO RISE TO THE STATUS OF DEMIGOD?

he creative DNA of apocryphal Kiwi folk troubadours, Flight of the Conchords, courses through the veins of the the latest Muppet movie. It's directed by Conchords mainstay, James Bobin, it co-stars one of the band, Jemaine Clement, as a Siberian jailbird, and all the songs have been written by Bret McKenzie. *LWLies* spoke to McKenzie down the line from his home in Wellington, New Zealand, to find out how he attacked the tracks for that difficult second movie.

LWLies: What do you remember of your first day working on Muppets Most Wanted?

McKenzie: The first song I worked on was the opening song, 'We're Doing a Sequel'. It's a song about sequels. It was reassuring, as the Muppets have the great ability to be self-aware, and unlike most sequels, the Muppets can talk directly about the fact that they're making a sequel and that it might not be very good.

Did the songs come to you more naturally second time round?

Now, I'm very much part of the Muppet world. I'm like a foster child. A foster Muppet. I know all the characters, I know what they all can and can't do. I'm pretty comfortable with the Muppet sound. One of the things I do is that I go into the Disney studio and sing all my songs to the executive team. It was amazing singing Miss Piggy's big ballad to them all.

Was that in a big steel-and-glass board room?

Yeah, it's this big board room and I'm there singing in a pig voice.

Did you find with this film you could push the music further than in *The Muppets*?

I've always wanted to be able to write a doo-wop song. We tried a couple of times in *Conchords* but it never happened. So, for the prison song for Tina Fey, I was determined to get that in there. That old rock 'n' roll sound in the gulag. I'm also a sucker for that Michael McDonald 'yacht rock' sound. Even though no one else seems to be as committed as I am to that. There's a few songs that were more directly "Muppety", like they were Broadway showtunes. And there's a couple that are pastiches of genre. And the ballad. That's pretty Elton John. A bit 'Tiny Dancer'.

Is there an era or specific type of Muppet music that you're particularly fond of?

Well, I've got to admit I'm not a massive showtune fan. I don't know my Broadway history, but I really know my Muppet history. I'm a big fan of Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher's work. And Joe Raposo who did some of the earlier tracks. Mainly Paul Williams, though. He did songs like 'The Rainbow Connection' and 'Movin' Right Along'. He coined what I think

of as the Muppet sound, which is the banjo and the piano, a little bit New Orleans and little bit cabaret/honky-tonk.

What is it you like about the Paul Williams sound?

I love his melodies. Do you know that song, 'Just An Old Fashioned Love Song'? He just has this incredible gift for melody. I also love Jim Henson's use of music, where he allows songs to meander and turn corners on screen. Now, it's harder to do, as everything is edited down and needs to be compact. 'The Rainbow Connection', for example, is this long, gentle dreamy song which, on screen, is just one long take of a frog playing a banjo.

When you write the songs, are you trying to fit them into two-minute slots?

Yeah. James Bobin loves a short song. They always start off around four minutes, and then gradually they're chopped down. Even in the movie, the verses get cut out so they're shorter and snappier and you get straight to the story.

That must be tough. As a physical process, but also on you.

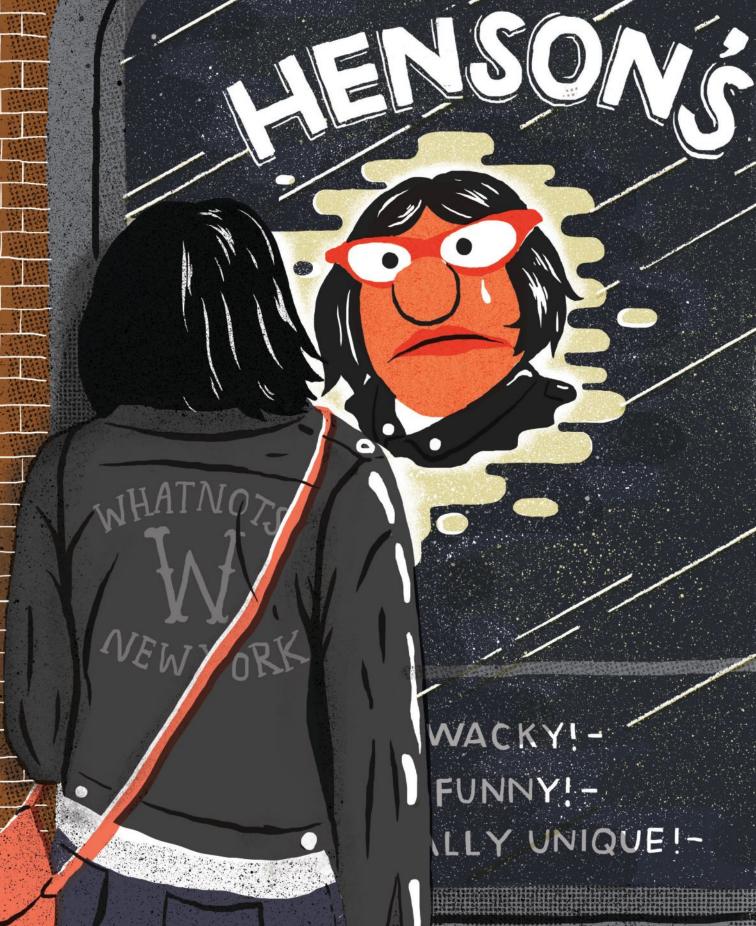
Yeah, it's pretty heartbreaking when I come to the edit and most of the song has been taken away. It's all in the interest of the movie as a whole. There's a song in the middle, the yacht rock song, with the evil frog singing to Piggy. He's listing to all these things he's going to give her. There's this cockatoo/kangaroo rhyme that I really liked. And it got cut. But the longer versions will be on the album. So that's kinda cool.

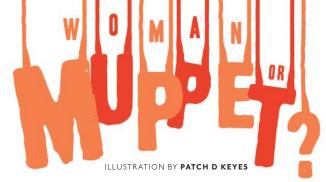
The songs in this film feel very organic — like very few electronic instruments were used. Was that the case?

It was very '70s the way we produced the music. Except for the use of Autotune. Because a lot of these Muppets can't sing. And neither can the stars! We were working in Los Angeles in a beautiful old studio called Ocean Way. Lots of classic artists have worked there and there are pictures of Frank Sinatra on the wall. And the session players are all veterans who played on loads of great '70s and '80s records. It was a very rich production. None of the music was built on the computer.

It must have been incredible working with these guys.

It's one of my favourite parts. I said to the drummer, this guy called JR, that I wanted the drums to sound like 'All Night Long' by Lionel Richie. And he said, "I played on that. In this room". And then he just jumps in and plays it exactly how I wanted. It's just awesome seeing these amazing players who just have a feel for the music. That's probably my favourite part of the job — the days spent with the band. There's nothing like watching a band of really great players making my song sound a lot better than I ever could ?





WITH THE LOVE OF HER LIFE, REBECCA ELLIS YOMPED ACROSS THE POND TO MEET (AND CREATE) HER MUPPET COUNTERPART.

m I a Man or am I a Muppet? I am, in actual fact, one of a relative minority of people who could oddly answer 'both' to that deeply metaphorical conundrum.

I am the proud owner of a Muppet twin: Wanda the Whatnot. She is the result of an inadvertent pilgrimage to Jim Henson's Whatnot Workshop in New

York City and is the amalgamation of my true self and my insatiable Muppet alter ego. Henson buffs will recognise the expression 'Whatnot' as the endearing term coined for the weird and wacky extras that populate the backdrop of the teeming Muppet-verse. Initially featureless but brought to life by Henson's team of talented muppeteers, Whatnots are assigned instant, unforgettable personalities based on their oversized physiognomies. And now one of those Whatnots is me.

I have been a Muppet fan for as long as I can remember. Watching *The Muppet Show* as a kid was always a family highlight and today evokes a sense of fuzzy childhood nostalgia. My sister and I would stage our own Muppet shows every weekend, giving personalities to whatever inanimate objects we could find around the house. The finale usually culminating in an enthusiastic duet of the famous 'Mahna Mahna' song, much to our parents' delight.

Growing up, I wanted to be as unruly as Miss Piggy, have a friendship as close as Bert and Ernie's and finally meet a guy like Kermit. Most girls played out fantasies of happily ever after through Barbie and Ken. Not me. Miss Piggy and Kermie were my match made in heaven. I wanted a boyfriend I could boss around, who'd let me hog the limelight. My overpowering displays of unreciprocated affection would have him begging me to get off, quivering in fear at the sound of my deafening voice. Needless to say, I remained single for many years until miraculously meeting my real-life Kermie over, among other things, a mutual love of all things Henson. I had him at "Hiiiiiiii-Yaaaaaaaa!!!"

In the summer of 2010, these two Muppets decided they were ready to take Manhattan. Central to our ambitious itinerary was a trip to FAO Schwartz on Fifth Avenue, America's oldest toy store and home to the now legendary giant floor piano from childhood favourite, *Big.* Maybe Kermie and I would get to recreate the 'Chopsticks' scene and my fancy footwork would be spotted by a Toy Company Executive? It didn't happen. Then, while disappointedly stroking a life-sized toy giraffe, I spied the entrance to Jim Henson's 'Whatnot Workshop'.

'Wacky! Funny! Totally Unique!' screamed the sign. Grabbing Kermie, who had wandered off to admire a lego Indiana Jones, we raced over to what can only be described as Muppet Mecca. Closer inspection revealed that for a mere 100 greenbacks, Muppet fans could have the opportunity to design

and create a Muppet version of themselves. My pre-New York Google searches had been so preoccupied with where Sally faked her orgasm that this had completely escaped my radar. The decision to be forever embalmed in Muppet form was instantaneous. We were informed that the process could take up to an hour. I could've stayed all day. Inside was a thriving hotbed of Muppet taxidermy with folks champing at the bit to create their very own muppet clone; some opting for uncannily lifelike replicas and others creating their long suppressed monstrous alter egos. I decided that my Muppet, while hopefully bearing some resemblance to me, would channel my inner Miss Piggy: a diva with a killer hairdo and attitude to match.

Manning the counter was a real-life Oscar the Grouch, a grumpy old soul in a Beaker-style lab coat and a nose to rival Gonzo. He provided us with a catalogue illustrating a vast assortment of muppet body parts, facial features, hairstyles and crazy accessories from which to customise our Muppet selves. We firstly selected our Muppet's head, body and colour. I picked orange as I rather fancied the idea that maybe my Muppet could be one of Ernie's long-lost relatives. Presented with a plethora of facial features, accessories and hairstyles, I chose a glamorous version of my real life goggles with bright red '50s cat eye frames and a blunt *Pulp Fiction* bob to complete the look. Girl, you'll be a Muppet soon.

Choosing an outfit was the final stage. I opted for a black biker jacket synonymous with many of my favourite TV and film characters, giving my muppet the combined cool of the Fonz, *Dirty Dancing's Johnny*, The Terminator and end-of-*Grease Sandy* all rolled into one. Meanwhile, Kermie opted for a sensitive, blue dude with big eyes, a shock of black fluffy hair and a baseball shirt – Waldo the Whatnot. The resemblance was uncanny. Beaker began to bring our Muppets to life before our very eyes. Stuffing, gluing, dressing, then giving the hair a final brush. As he handed them over, I'm sure I saw Wanda giving Waldo a cheeky wink through those super hot specs. God knows what they got up to in the luggage hold of the plane.

Cut to present day and it's just me and Wanda now. Kermie and Waldo made a break for the big-time when Kermie realised that it isn't easy being green when you are in fact so blue. It was a *Kramer versus Kramer*-style struggle deciding who would 'get the Muppets'. One of our saddest decisions was that Wanda and Waldo would have to part forever. Whenever I go out and leave Wanda home alone, I make sure to leave her next to the phone on the off chance she has Waldo on Speed dial. Who am I kidding? She's probably sexting him right now

STATLER AND WALDORF PICTURES PRESENTS



A RETRO MOVIE POSTER

SPECTACULAR "COLOR

IN 1979, THE VERY FIRST MUPPETS FILM WAS RELEASED, ENTITLED THE MUPPET MOVIE. IN CELEBRATION OF THIS MOMENTOUS OCCASION, LWLIES TAKES A TRIP BACK IN TIME TO PERUSE ITS BIGGEST AND BADDEST BOX-OFFICE RIVALS.

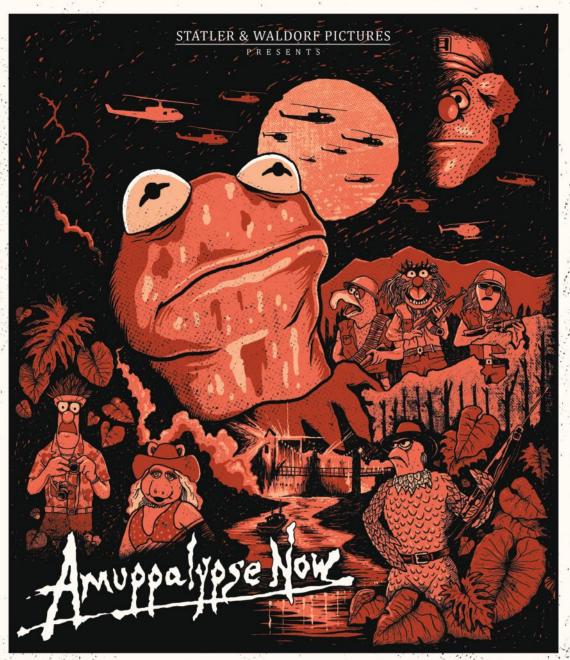


EDGARREGALADO

DIRECTED BY ANIMAL MILLER

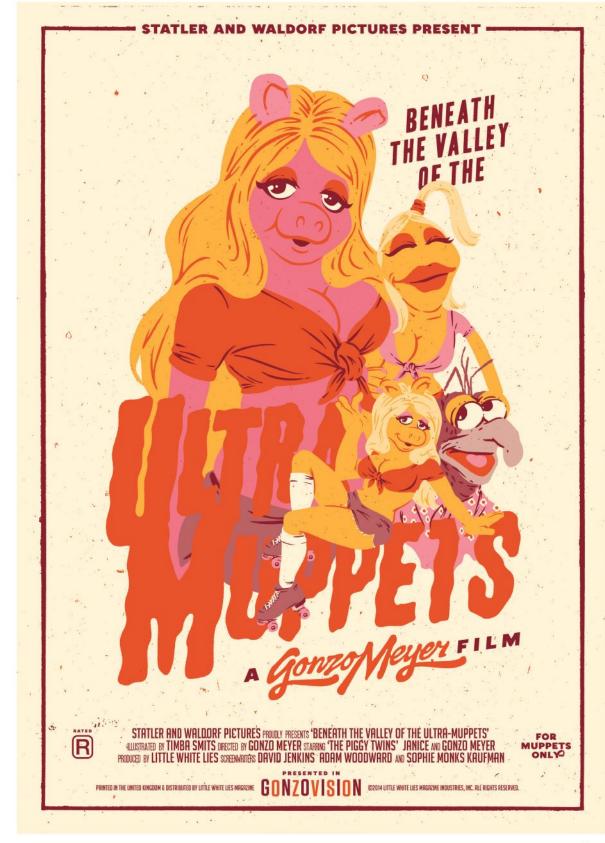
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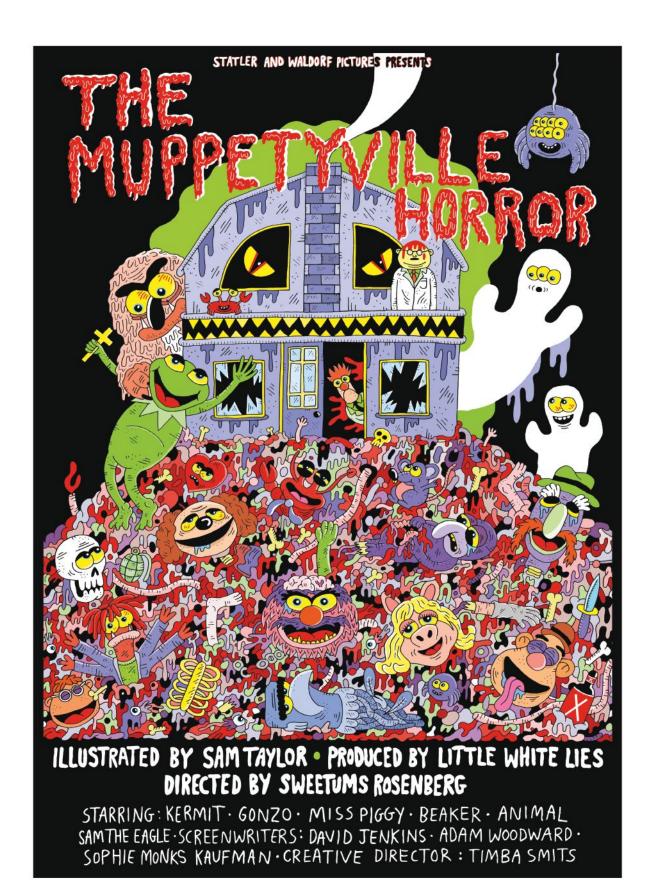
STARRING
ANIMAL
CREATIVE DIRECTOR
TIMBA SMITS



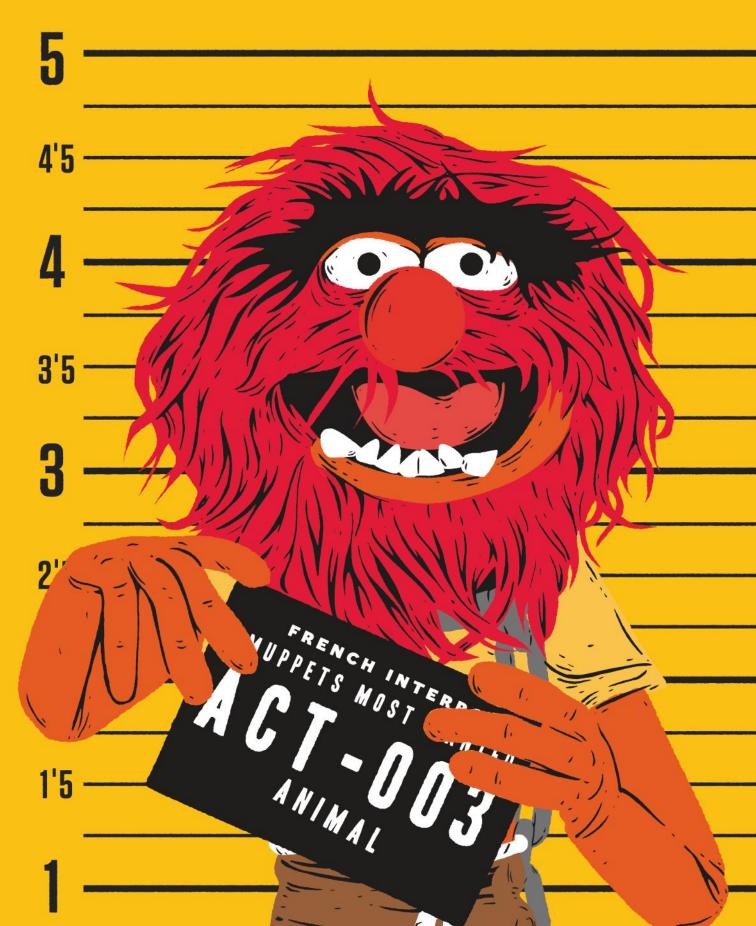
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CONTENTS

48-50 / FEATURE: REMEMBERING JAMES DEAN 52 / THE DOUBLE

53 / INTERVIEW: MIA WASIKOWSKA
54 / CALVARY
55 / INTERVIEW: BRENDAN GLEESON

56 / MAGIC MAGIC 57 / INTERVIEW: JUNO TEMPLE 58 / STARRED UP

59 / INTERVIEW: BEN MENDELSOHN
60-61 / NYMPHOMANIAC
62-63 / INTERVIEW: CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG,

STELLAN SKARSGÅRD, STACY MARTIN
64 / THE RAID 2
65 / SALVO

66 / VISITORS 67 / LOCKE 68 / TRACKS

69 / WAKE IN FRIGHT
70 / THE UNKNOWN KNOWN
72 / THE ZERO THEOREM

73 / EXHIBITION
74 / A STORY OF CHILDREN AND FILM
75 / INTERVIEW: MARK COUSINS

76 / THE PAST
77 / FEATURE: ON SET WITH JACQUES GITES
78-79 / THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

80 / WE ARE THE BEST!
81 / INTERVIEW: LUKAS MOODYSSON
82 / THE STRANGE COLOUR OF YOUR BODY'S TEARS / THE STAG

83 / THE MACHINE / THE ROCKET 84-85 / UNDER THE SKIN 86 / INTERVIEW: MICA LEVI

88-89 / HOME ENTS
90-91 / JOURNEYS: GOTHENBURG + BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL
92 / EX-RENT HELL PRESENTS: MEET THE FEEBLES



The Dean

Ahead of three restored re-releases of classic James Dean movies, *LWLies* gauges the cultural impact of the clean-cut all-American icon.

y the time I turned 21, I had been to Fairmount, Indiana a half dozen times. Located a couple hours drive from my own hometown, Fairmount is the place where James Byron Dean grew up.

With a population of just 3000, there's not much to see in Fairmount, certainly not enough to justify so many trips. On county highway 150 you can see the farm where Dean went to live with Ortense and Marcus Winslow, his aunt and uncle, after his mother died - it's north of town, just past the Park Cemetery. In the winter of 1955, with Dean's first movie, Elia Kazan's East of Eden, poised to open that March, photographer Dennis Stock took a series of iconic portraits of Dean in Fairmount which would run in LIFE magazine. The pictures, in a spread subtitled "Barn to Broadway", contrasted Dean's bohemian life in New York City with his rural roots. In one picture, Dean poses in an open casket in the local funeral parlor. In another, he stands next to the headstone of one of his ancestors. Cal Dean - coincidentally "Cal" is the name of Dean's character in East of Eden - in Park Cemetery, only a few paces from where he himself would be buried by the year's end.

The framing of the Cal Dean photo is reproduced in the music video for 'Suedehead', the first solo single by Morrissey, who, before The Smiths, had written a paperback paean to his idol called 'James Dean is Not Dead'. In the video, Moz swans about Fairmount and strikes various pensive and sorrowful poses against the sober Midwestern background, chugging around the Winslow farm on a tractor or walking the halls of Fairmount High School, the brick and limestone building from which Dean graduated in 1949, which has been boarded up since the '80s. On one of my Fairmount visits, I hauled myself through the open second-sto-

rey window of the building, saw the dilapidated auditorium and the stage whose rotting boards Dean had once walked, and the same graffiti featured in the 'Suedehead' video, which reads "You Can't Go Home Again".

The phrase refers to a novel by Thomas Wolfe; Dean's Rebel Without a Cause director Nicholas Ray would cadge it for an experimental film he made with his students at a state university in the '70s. While he has fallen somewhat from favour today, in the 1930s Wolfe struck a chord with young men like Ray who felt estranged from the possibilities of the world they were offered. "Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent?" wrote Wolfe. "Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone? O waste of loss, in the hot mazes, lost, among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door. Where? When? O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again."

James Dean unearthed what Wolfe called the buried life, spoke aloud of repressed, inchoate frustration. He got away with this, for a time at least, because he was a charismatic, ludicrously good-looking kid whose appeal worked on both women and men. Dean's rise was roughly contemporaneous to Elvis', except he never got fat. He played the lead in three high-profile films with A-list directors, and then died aged 24, while driving a very cool car very fast.

Before Hollywood, Dean had invented himself in New York. He took lessons at the Actors Studio and bought the beatnik identikit, bongos and all. Dean worked as a gigging TV actor — you can see him getting slugged by Ronald Reagan in a 1954 General Electric Theater telecast *The Dark, Dark Hours* on

YouTube — but his reputation rests on those three performances. On three names, eight letters each, each one ending on a hard 'k': Cal Trask, Jim Stark, Jett Rink.

East of Eden was the only one of Dean's films released before his death. It's a custom starmaking vehicle — Dean is in practically every scene — and Kazan quickly establishes the template of the actor's screen persona. Dean's Cal Trask first appears sitting on a curbside, casting a surreptitious glance at a passing figure, the madame who's rumoured to be his absentee mother. Following her, he hangs back at a distance. He is outside, apart, alone. The kids at school, we learn, have nicknamed Cal "The Lurker".

East of Eden was the first Dean film I ever saw. The image of Cal alone riding atop a freight train boxcar, shivering and huddled, punctured me. Deprived of love by a preachy, withholding father who dotes on his brother, Cal is always grasping for something to hold, clutching himself when there's nothing else. Juvie toughs for decades to come will imitate bantam cock Dean's trick of puffing up his biceps by folding his hands underneath them. Dean is full of such expressive resources; elsewhere he winds his hands through the straps of his overalls, as though his arm is in a sling. The effect here underscores Cal's wounded vulnerability, while some of Dean's more baroque mannerisms are simply bizarre: after a punch-up with his brother, Cal stumble-runs to the nearest saloon and, ordering a slug of whiskey at the bar, proceeds to fumble the glass as though he's never held one before.

If East of Eden established the Dean persona, Rebel Without a Cause, released a month after the actor's death, emblazoned it in legend. Dean plays a California teen in both films, but Eden is set in the



years before and during the Great War, while Rebel takes place in an entirely contemporary suburban Los Angeles. Dean is still fending off the cold as Rebel opens, drunkenly tucking a discarded wind-up toy monkey under a piece of newspaper, proof of Jim Stark's nurturing instinct. This is, however, a paltry shelter against impending Armageddon. Rebel is structured as a chain reaction of explosions leading towards a Big Bang: the backfire of the scooter driven by Plato (Sal Mineo) that announces the raising of the American flag over Dawson High School: the drily-narrated end of the universe in the Griffith Observatory planetarium; the "chickie run" that ends in a fatal plume of fire - the film's original treatment even had Plato committing suicide with a live grenade!

Rebel blew a hole in the public consciousness, widened the breach through which pop culture as we now know it would spill. In 1955 Dean was labelled the latest emissary of The Method, of a private, inwardly-generated acting style widely associated with Brando's mumbling. Dean, who idolised Brando, would often deliver his lines like secrets, turned away from whomever he's addressing. But what strikes the contemporary viewer about Dean is his swashbuckling brio, the way he bounds, sneaks, climbs, skitters. He has all the quicksilver mutability of youth - of picking up identities, trying them on for size, and discarding them, one minute boisterous and expansive, the next aloof and crabbed.

Looking at *Eden* and *Rebel* alone, we can find some justice to Thom Andersen's statement in his film essay *Los Angeles Plays Itself* that Dean was "more of a rebel in life than in the movies where he always played a milquetoast Oedipus, trying not to murder but to please an imperfect father who is either too stern or too soft." This formulation is complicated by *Giant*,

however, and by Dean's Jett Rink, who has no father to suck up to.

George Stevens' film is a hulking adaptation of Edna Ferber's novel of the same name, about a Texas family, the Benedicts, and its ancillary members. The protagonist and patriarch is cattle baron "Bick" Benedict (Rock Hudson). Bick is big, straight-backed, forthright, with all the confidence of century-old landed gentry in good standing. Dean's slinky Jett Rink is a blight on Bick's kingdom, wily wildcatting white trash scratching around on the lean ends of the Benedict property for oil. Pushing his Stetson down over his expressive steepled eyebrows, Dean uses the shadow cast by its brim as a hiding place. He's playing "The Lurker" again: at a communal barbecue, where Jett warily views the proceedings from behind a horse's flank before slipping into the back seat of his boss' enormous roadster and putting his feet up, imagining what it would be like to give orders. Like all of Dean's characters, Jett has the feeling that he has been born in the wrong place. "Me," he says, "I'm gonna get out of here one of these days."

We get to see what becomes of Jett's ambition. He strikes oil, and the movie leaps forward 25 years. The shy young peckerwood with a casual dependency on alcohol has become a middle-aged plutocrat and catastrophic toper, further retreating from the world behind sunglasses, a cloud of bourbon and a pile of money. Dean would always bobble lines, but his grey-templed Jett is barely verbal. While most actors playing drunk feel the need to let their intelligence shine through, here is one of cinema's most no-quarter, fall-downknee-walking-blackout-squiffed performances. This Jett Rink is the sum of Cal or Jim's fears for their future: A stunted, bitter brat who never learned how to grow up.

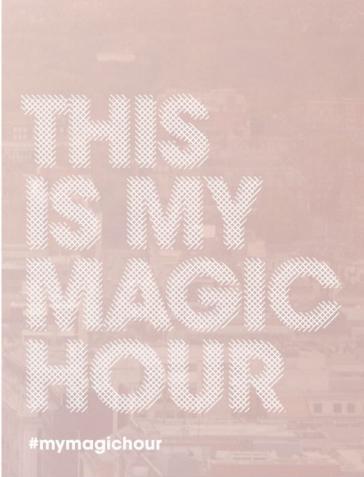
No less than the sententious patriarch of

East of Eden, Stevens favours his good son. Bick learns humility and finds grace: Jett learns pride and is cast into perdition. Jett embodies the worst barbaric excesses of the Texas nouveau riche, like Paul Newman's title character in 1963's Hud. But Jett's arriviste fecklessness, like Hud's, is more magnetic than the plainspoken decency to which it is contrasted. I suppose there must be people who watch Giant and are more interested in the Benedicts than they are in Jett Rink, but I can't claim to understand those people. The movie is electric, jaggedly modern and alive when Dean is on-screen. He's a hot-rodder who pulls into Stevens' elegiac prestige picture only to do doughnuts all over it.

We all know what happened next. Dean's follow-up to Giant was to have been 1956's Somebody Up There Likes Me, but the role of Rocky Graziano went to Newman instead, the actor's first film lead. Newman was compactly built with a dashing close-up ready bust - and he loved cool cars, too - but nobody could just waltz into that Dean-sized hole. Dennis Hopper, who'd appeared with Dean in both Rebel and Giant, knew he wasn't up to the task, and instead proselytised for the personal cult he created around his late friend. Dean's wreck was a big mess, and we're still finding little bits of Jimmy everywhere: in Hopper's countercultural ideal and Charles Starkweather and The 400 Blows and James Deen and, yes, in Morrissey and his "It takes strength to be gentle and kind." The ambiguous masculine identity that Dean projected is distinctly American, and paradoxically this makes him easy to translate. Wherever the piteous cry "O lost" goes up, that's where he can be found (1)

Digital restorations of East of Eden, Giant and Rebel Without a Cause will be released 18 April.





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The Double

Directed by RICHARD AYOADE
Starring JESSE EISENBERG, MIA WASIKOWSKA, CHRIS O'DOWD
Released 4 APRIL

man slumbers on a train. This opening image from *The Double* might just be all that is strictly real in this uncanny, oneiric trip through an individual's divided psyche — but that hardly means we should not follow Simon James (Jesse Eisenberg) all the way to the end of the line in an attempt to understand this man and his place (which in its way reflects our own).

"You're in my place," are the first words spoken to Simon, as a shadowy commuter insists Simon yield his seat in the otherwise empty carriage — and it is essential to Simon's character that he does indeed yield, yet secretly begrudges doing so. An undemonstrative drone living in a bleak neighbourhood rife with suicides, Simon goes unnoticed and unrecognised by superiors, co-workers, and even his own mother.

But after an uncharacteristic overture to 'copy girl' Hannah (Mia Wasikowska), the colleague-cum-neighbour whom he recognises as a kindred spirit of loneliness and invisibility, ends in his humiliation at the office ball, Simon meets — or is it conjures? — James Simon (also Eisenberg), a physical doppelgänger but, in his slick confidence and womanising ways, Simon's polar opposite in character. As the initially friendly James gradually appropriates Simon's

work, his apartment and even his beloved Hannah, our put-upon hero realises that at least one of them must disappear permanently.

Director Richard Ayoade and co-writer Avi (brother of Harmony) Korine have been very free in their adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 1846 novella 'The Double: A Petersburg Poem', renaming all their inherited characters, adding many new ones, and relocating the internalised action from Tsarist Petersburg to a retrofuturist dystopia. But they have nonetheless remained very true to Dostoyevsky's duplicitous ambiguities and proto-existentialist spirit, so that the film relates to its literary source much as James relates to Simon.

If the nightmarish world of *The Double* maps out its protagonist's paranoid inner life while evoking the similarly hermetic headspaces depicted in *The Trial, Eraserhead* and *Brazil*, there are also mirrored in its drab surfaces different aspects of Ayoade's own multi-faceted career: all the key players from his rather different feature debut *Submarine*, as well as the ultra-lo-res computer graphics, absurdist office politics and the odd cast member from his TV sitcom *The IT Crowd*.

The result is both a technical marvel and an appealingly eccentric curio. For no

matter whether *The Double* is viewed as a 'night terror', a Kafkaesque comedy (with suicidal tendencies), or a long, dark journey into Simon's schizophrenic 'ames' (a security guard's insistently incomplete spelling of Simon's surname, corresponding to the French for 'souls'), Ayoade has crafted a disorienting human mystery tinged with romance, melancholy and humour blacker than night — as well as a quirky entry in the 'invisible friend' subgenre. Think *Fight Club* recast in a shabby Gilliam-esque microcosm of ducts, valves and cheesy '60s pop ballads (mostly Japanese, for some reason). It'll have you seeing double, and wishing for a repeat viewing. ANTON BITEL

ANTICIPATION. A British comic mannerist's take on Dostoyevsky's darkest writing.

-

ENJOYMENT. Duplicitous, yet singular.

4

IN RETROSPECT. It would be mad to let its particular genius, like its protagonist's, go unrecognised.

Mia Wasikowska

With two films due for release and two more in the can, 2014 is shaping up to be a busy year for the young Australian actress, who took time out of her schedule to talk movies with *LWLies*.

he's been Alice in Wonderland, Jane Eyre and goth latch-key weirdo, India Stoker, all characters with compelling inner lives. Now actor Mia Wasikowska is set to burrow inside the public imagination with two new films. In Richard Ayoade's eccentric Dostoyevsky-inspired drama, The Double, she plays the enigmatic girl-nextdoor, Hannah, and in memoir-based desertadventure, Tracks, she's headstrong lead, Robyn Davidson. Further ahead, expect to see Wasikowska returning to Wonderland, embodying literary adultress Madame Boyary and working with contemporary cinematic powerhouses David Cronenberg and Guillermo del Toro. LWLies sat down with the poised and thoughtful 24-year-old to chat about this ample output.

LWLies: In *The Double* Hannah favours Simon's dastardly doppelgänger. Why?

Wasikowska: She was the most ambiguous character that I'd ever read. I couldn't tell if we were supposed to like her or if she was mean, because she's both. Richard really solidified who she was for me. Being blind to the good person you could have a nice life with and having your attention diverted to the bad boy is a very identifiable thing. I like this film because it makes it slightly more heightened, that whole dilemma.

Why did she always have blood on her fingertips?

That's up to the individual to interpret. There was a lot of symbolism. She uses red ink and then it would end up on her hands. It depends how much of a part you think she played in the downfall of this one character and how you interpret it all in general.



To borrow a question from the film, do you think you're a lonely person?

I've experienced loneliness but I've learnt that there's a difference between loneliness and solitude. Solitude is being at peace with yourself when you're on your own and loneliness is... it's very obvious what loneliness is. I wouldn't define myself as a lonely person but I definitely understand it and play a lot of lonely characters.

Does thriving professionally in a creative industry help you to feel connected to the world?

It's a bit of a dichotomy. In one way you're very connected because you're meeting a lot of people and working on things creatively together, which is really fun. In another way you're there for a very short amount of time and then everybody disperses and it's not always

like there are emotional connections — and if there are, you have to leave them. So it's a bit of both. Nice and then quite lonely. It's not a consistent lifestyle.

Did you and the real Robyn Davidson talk?

They convinced me to meet her and it was such a relief, because I could let go a little bit in terms of not being scared that she was going to come after me with a dagger. The Robyn in the book is the kind of person you can imagine punching someone who was going to play her, but she was incredibly nice.

When you were filming Jane Eyre, you had a secret pocket stitched into your costume so you could store a camera and take photos between takes. Were you tempted to do the same while shooting Tracks in the South Australian desert?

I was but was already overwhelmed by the process of being out there. So it was the first film where I replaced photography with knitting. I got obsessive. I knitted seven or eight beanies and crocheted a blanket. I was in 30-degree heat knitting beanies.

One of your next films satirises the film industry. What can you say about David Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars*?

It's a commentary on Hollywood and it's got quite a dark perspective, but is also very funny. I always admire people who can walk that fine line of being emotional and dark but also very funny at the same time. Richard Ayoade also does that very well... I'm excited about *Maps to the Stars*. It's got a great cast, bizarre characters and scenarios, so it should be interesting to see how the industry responds to that



Calvary

Directed by JOHN MICHAEL MCDONAGH
Starring BRENDAN GLEESON, KELLY REILLY, CHRIS O'DOWD
Released 11 APRIL



he battle between fervent religiosity and intense, common-sense atheism rages in a small County Sligo costal village as the local priest (Brendan Gleeson's Father James) is politely informed - in the confession box, no less - that he has seven days to live. Like an elongated episode of Father Ted with the intellectual rigour of Robert Bresson's Diary of a Country Priest, John Michael McDonagh's extraordinary film presents deep existential torment under the guise of a parochial murder mystery. The audience are not shown the face of the murderer-in-waiting, but this is nothing more than a narrative red herring. McDonagh has no interest in cultivating a superficial mystery, instead employing this situation as a platform to explore the metaphysical conundrums of life in the modern priesthood and in turn creating a noir-tinged Celtic western of incredible substance, rich nuance and heightened drama.

McDonagh's writing and direction here are exemplary, as each of the eccentric side-players — some potential murder suspects — emerges as rounded, unpredictable, memorable and humane. They also represent some of the toughest challenges to the tenets of Catholicism today, from sexual rootlessness and ingrained racism through to the morality of war and the consolations of money.

There's even a miracle, too, in the form of Gleeson's monumental central performance. His hapless holyman, refusing to let his apparently inevitable demise dent his unerring duty to the compassionate life, recalls the unsmiling melancholy and grizzled world-weariness of Robert Mitchum in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*. His strange acceptance of his fate even signals a dedication to faith that perhaps transcends the physical world. Or could it possibly be a man finally being offered the prospect of sweet relief?

Among the numerous knock-out twohander scenes, the film's greatest triumph is a sub-plot involving James and his semiestranged/suicidally depressed played by Kelly Reilly. The gruelling details of her situation exacerbate the significance of his fate, imbuing his proclamations of solace with something of a hollow core. But the subtle interactions between the pair paint a long and turbulent history with minimal recourse to direct exposition. McDonagh seldom resorts to banal plot mechanics, opting instead for hardboiled discourse which channels the film's themes by stealth. Rather than the unfolding of the plot, it is the process of watching people in deep, detailed conversation that provides Calvary's simplest pleasure.

Yet just as the dialogue attacks its subject

through indirect means, Calvary is more than a blunt treatise on devotion versus atheism. During his various showdowns, Gleeson's priest rarely cites scripture as a moral precedent, attempting to operate as a counsellor who realises that a meaningful emotional connection can only be forged through discourse removed from any of the Bible's antiquated or haughty notions. But McDonagh is nothing if not evenhanded, and he has made a film which gets to the heart of what it means to hold religious values in the 21st century. This is not a blind faith in magic and miracles or the opportunity to administer life lessons to your fellow man, but as a human conduit for empathy. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. John Michael McDonagh's debut, The Guard, was a frisky thriller, if not quite fully-formed.

3

ENJOYMENT. Its sensitivity and even-handedness make this a heart-wrenching joy to behold.

4

IN RETROSPECT. A knock-out. Works like gangbusters on every level.

Brendan Gleeson

Following his towering performance in *Calvary*, Irish cinema's unsung hero speaks to *LWLies* about the most emotionally and spiritually draining role of his career.

he title of John Michael McDonagh's bruising and brilliant second feature refers to the site outside Jerusalem's walls where Jesus was crucified. It's a fitting metaphor for Brendan Gleeson's mildmannered priest, slowly and agonisingly put to the rack by his acrimonious parishioners in provincial Ireland. Gleeson has appeared in over 60 features and has worked with everyone from Martin Scorsese to Anthony Minghella and John Boorman. But his massive talent has arguably never been harnessed more effectively than under the director siblings John Michael and Martin McDonagh (In Bruges). When Gleeson called LWLies from a blustery Dublin, he spoke candidly about the unexpected physical and emotional toll that playing a man of the cloth took on him.

Gleeson: It's a mad stormy day here.

LWLies: Quite apt for the film...

Yes, exactly!

It must be great working with someone like John, who writes such meaty parts for you...

It's what you get into this industry to do. This film actually came out of a conversation we had at the end of *The Guard* where we were talking about how desperate it must be being a good priest at the moment, given all the bad publicity the priesthood has received. He basically said, "If I write it will you play it?" and I said yes immediately. So it was something that germinated from just an idle conversation, but it became far more personal than I'd imagined.

Personal in what way?

Well, I went to a Christian Brothers' school.

Now, the Christian Brothers had a pretty fearsome reputation at this point, and there was a brother, Pat Brogan, there in primary school who had a massive positive influence on me as a kid; he was quite artistic himself and would put on a lot of concerts and have us sing and hike up mountains and things like that. I only realised recently that perhaps part of what I was doing was flying the banner for him. I had a very odd feeling when I was trying on the vestments for the first time.

The costume fits you very well.

[Laughs] Oh, thanks! I tell you what though, I couldn't wait to take it off every day. I'm not particularly into all that method acting stuff, I don't need to live it to do it, but there are certain roles that require you to go to a deeper place.

Every day people are trying to break this guy, and at the same time secretly hoping he won't break. I remember one Friday evening, about three of four weeks into the shoot, we were working on the scene in the toilet where I walk in on Aidan Gillen. I was so exhausted and on one of the takes John had quietly told Aidan to just say something in my ear as I went out the door, and Aidan said "arsehole". I really felt like turning around and thumping him. I actually felt like braining the bugger. The spiritual assault was relentless.

It all sounds very intense.

Well, we certainly didn't have a laugh that day. Or any day... I mean, I was happy, but absolutely miserable at the same time. It was an interesting experience. Part of me doesn't want to talk about it at all, actually. I feel like the film we've made is the film we set out to make, and to comment on it is diminishing it in some way.

It's not called 'Calvary' for nothing, right?

Exactly. But listen, the whole thing has been a complete privilege from start to finish. John is special.

The film has a great sense of morbid humour which feels typically Irish. Where do you think this comes from?

I think it comes from the weather to be honest. You've got to have a laugh, haven't you? Otherwise, well... There's a great Irish tradition of telling people lies and seeing if they believe them. *The Guard* was full of that. My father was from Tipperary and their mode of humour was to tell fibs to people and keep it going. People would believe stuff for years (A)





Magic Magic

Directed by SEBASTIÁN SILVA
Starring JUNO TEMPLE, MICHAEL CERA, EMILY BROWNING
Released 18 APRIL

t's a familiar narrative. Sebastián Silva's Magic Magic had a beleaguered production beset by technical problems and scheduling conflicts, the already complicated shoot faced several protracted delays. Stalled for three months and left with a crew and a lot of free time, Silva took the film's star and executive producer, Michael Cera, and did what any resourceful director might do under similar circumstances: he made another movie. The result was a low-key, largely improvised road-movie called Crystal Fairy & the Magical Cactus and 2012, a sort of comic companion piece to the more serious Magic Magic. But when the two films premiered together at the Sundance Film Festival in 2013, a funny thing happened: the surprise success of the minor film somehow eclipsed what was intended to be the main event. Crystal Fairy was picked up by IFC and hit theatres in North America in July 2013. Meanwhile Magic Magic headed straight

Fortunately, Silva has had better luck selling *Magic Magic* abroad, and as it makes its way to UK cinemas it has the opportunity to succeed against the odds. As, of course, it ought to: a compelling and assured psychological thriller in the Roman Polanski mould, *Magic Magic*

deserves considerably more attention than its stateside reputation suggests. Silva made a name for himself internationally with his dry class comedy The Maid and, as in that film, he continues to prove himself a perceptive satirist of disparity and privilege. In Crystal Fairy, his subject was the ignorance and entitlement with which boorish American tourists charge into countries they perceive to be somehow beneath them, and that dimension of the film recurs in Michael Cera's obnoxious character here. The distinction this time around is largely tonal: where Silva once sought to find the humor in Cera's vulgar clowning, he now strives to draw out its more dramatic implications, reconfiguring the attitude from outrageous to outright unbearable. It's a subtle shift, but a shrewd one - suddenly we see the cartoonish as grotesque, and what was funny seems much more severe.

The loathsome behaviour of Cera and his Chilean cohort is refracted, and perhaps even amplified, by the gaze of our ever-vexed heroine, Alicia (Juno Temple). A wearied, sleepless waif modelled in the tradition of Henry James, Alicia finds her already tenuous grasp of reality weakening by the hour. Naturally, the endless provocations of those around her begin to take

on a rather more sinister register, and as the film progresses we're encouraged to consider, as with 'The Turn of the Screw', whether the atmosphere of malevolence is a product of the place or, more palatably, our protagonist's encroaching madness. The film makes good use of a pretty dusty gimmick, but, to Silva's credit, he seems less interested in the conventions of the genre than in engaging with the very real ways people ignore and reject mental illness. And while the end result hardly resembles a position paper, it at least aspires to have something serious to say. CALUM MARSH

ANTICIPATION. Solid buzz out of Sundance, but direct-to-DVD in the US doesn't bode well.

3

ENJOYMENT. A deeply engrossing thriller with a major turn from Juno Temple.



IN RETROSPECT. A shrewdly ambiguous last act leaves us unsettled rather than satisfied—and that's a good thing.



Juno Temple

LWLies sits down with the Magic Magic star to talk movies, family and why Hollywood is a pretty cool place to live.

uno Temple got her first taste of the movie industry at seven, when her father Julien put her in his 1998 film Vigo: A Passion for Life. It was a bittersweet debut - she was cut from the final edit ("I got a very nice pair of OskKosh overalls and a plastic T-Rex, so it was a pretty good deal"). Temple's decision to stick with acting paid off in her mid-teens when she landed her first major role in Richard Eyre's psycho-Dench thriller, Notes on a Scandal. Now 24, Temple has established herself on both sides of the pond with a mix of blockbusters (The Dark Knight Rises) and lower-key productions (Killer Joe). Here she tells LWLies all about cutting her teeth, staying grounded and the personal challenge of working on Sebastián Silva's Chile-set psychological drama, Magic Magic.

LWLies: You've been acting from a young age. How much has that shaped you as a person?

Temple: I don't know. I think it's opened my eyes to a lot of things. Because you're playing all these different people, you learn so much about people and yourself and things that you might also have never experienced. You know, a book you might never have picked up or research you might never have done. It's like being a sponge and I love that. As an actor the best research you can do is just living life, sharing stories and remembering things. The one tough thing is, it's sometimes hard to talk to family and friends because you're on a tight schedule. That's hard because I miss that.

Do you go home when you're not shooting?

Absolutely! But home life isn't really that normal because my dad's a film director



and I grew up with the industry around me. It's great though, because my parents have both helped me to make decisions and are incredibly supportive. I'm incredibly close to my family and so whenever I get the chance it's great to go and spend time with them. I've got two fantastic younger brothers who keep me sane as well. But I get excited with each new adventure. It's important to touch base with reality now and then but Los Angeles, where I live, is great because it inspires you to keep looking for the next job. It's been very important for me to be there because as an actress I've really felt you need to be able to go into a room and actually meet people, and not just send a tape in.

What did you learn about yourself making this movie?

Oh, man. Some silly things, like how important it is to sleep... But I also learned a lot about

mental illness, I talked a lot about it and it's so important to try and understand it. I think the more we learn about it, the more we can help people.

What was filming in Chile like?

Utterly fascinating. You get to explore a lot as an actor, it's one of the coolest parts of the job, discovering these different pockets of the world. And also because when you go there you're usually there with people who know it really well. Chile is such a magical country. I really love challenging myself as an actress, taking on roles that scare you and make you feel uncomfortable. It's an amazing feeling when you overcome that. With each job, as I'm getting older, I appreciate being myself more — when I was younger it was harder to switch off from characters, and now I really look forward to that.

Is it harder when the character is quite disturbed, as in this case?

It was definitely harder while we were shooting. There were a few sleepless nights.

Throughout your career have you maintained a sense of your own trajectory?

Yes and no. I love the idea of being a chameleon. But it's really about connecting with a director and establishing trust with them. That's what I look for. Most of the decisions I've made in my career so far have been reactionary. I think it's a really important to balance commercial movies with films like *Magic Magic*. But it's all about time. Like, with a studio movie there's more time to shoot a scene — you might have two days as opposed to two hours. But there's no plan. I just know I want to do this for a long time



Starred Up

Directed by DAVID MACKENZIE
Starring JACK O'CONNELL, BEN MENDELSOHN, RUPERT FRIEND
Released 21 MARCH

hot in a disused correctional facility in Belfast and scripted by former prison worker Jonathan Asser, Starred Up is director David Mackenzie's authentically tough look at the penal system through the eyes of 19-year-old young offender Eric Love (Jack O'Connell), whose file has been marked on account of his excessively violent behaviour. We first meet Eric during processing at the maximum-security unit to which he's been transferred for an indeterminate stint. As he's clinically strip searched, put into uniform and escorted through long, cold corridors and up an exposed steel stairwell to his single cell, Eric is noticeably accepting of his new surroundings. But his placidity doesn't last long. In the next scene he strips off, douses himself in baby oil and gaffer-tapes a splintered chair leg to each hand, abusively goading the three officers who are about to blitz his cell in full riot gear for his (or is it their?) protection.

Eric's relentlessly combative disposition and substantial emotional scarring make him a high-risk inmate and the ideal subject for an experimental group therapy session run by well-intended but way-out-of-hisdepth volunteer Oliver (Rupert Friend). Initially resistant to Oliver's irregular methods, Eric is starting to show signs of reform when the root of his explosive self-destructiveness rears its ugly head in the form of fellow con Neville (Ben Mendelsohn), who also happens to be Eric's old man. If O'Connell is like a caged wild animal, Mendelsohn is the ineffectual circus trainer whose strict and stern lashes don't so much tame the beast as enrage it further. While the film boasts strong performances all round, it's this volatile central dynamic that proves the most potent. Mendelsohn is in menacing form here, but the largely unreciprocated affection he displays towards his son gives him a vulnerability that is duly exploited by those higher up the food chain.

Neville may be desperate for Eric to avoid making the same mistakes he did, but when the clink's top dog (Peter Ferdinando) tells Eric, "'Starred up' means you're a leader," we're left with the gutwrenching feeling that his fate has already been sealed: that he is destined to one day reach the top before in turn being overthrown. For all the advice and counselling he has been given and is yet to receive, Eric is an irreparably damaged and acutely dangerous individual for whom help has seemingly

arrived too late. The film's most powerful home truth is this: as long as Eric allows his violent outbursts to define him, this is where he belongs. Look back at that opening scene — it's Eric's familiarity with the processing procedure, not his perceived indifference towards it, that makes this short and unsettling chapter in his story so affecting.

O'Connell's electrifying physicality makes this an exciting and unpredictable portrait of prison life. But there can be no argument that incarceration is in any way glorified here. Starred Up is a bruising, unsentimental work that brilliantly contextualises the grim reality facing scores of young criminals entering prison today. Unlike the suffocating prison walls in which the drama unfolds, however, this is a film you'll want to revisit. ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. Slammer time.

ENJOYMENT. Prison is hell.

4

IN RETROSPECT. Jack O'Connell. Get it. Good.

Ben Mendelsohn

LWLies meets the Australian character actor who's making it his business to run away with every film he stars in.

LWLies: In the past you've spoken about the direct creative input you had on Derek Cianfrance's *The Place Beyond the Pines*. Is that something that happens a lot when you work on a movie?

Mendelsohn: Nah, it's different horses for different courses. Most times all you're doing is playing the fucking material anyway, you're doing whatever the scene needs. On something like *The Dark Knight Rises*, you get there, you shoot and off you go. With *Place Beyond the Pines*, we started it. We rehearsed, we had the time, we were kicking off. That was a case of Derek Cianfrance having written something and gone, "I dunno about whether I like what I wrote back then, maybe we'll do this instead..." I don't come up with a bunch of ideas, what I tend to try and do is pick something out from what's been given to me. That's what I think the job's about.

Do you find what input you do have is taken more seriously when you get to a certain level of success?

Yeah... ish... What you've always got to boil it down to is that if you're gonna go and do *The Cherry Orchard*, you're not gonna fucking change a word that's said, because it's not on you. You're just gonna do it the best you can. You don't fuck with what it is.

Are you still auditioning now?

Not really, not for a little while. I mean with *Batman*, Chris Nolan hadn't seen anything I'd done, so that was off a tape. Fucking Andrew's film, that fucking...

Killing Them Softly?

Fucking thank you. That one I had to fucking audition for.



Really? We thought you guys were mates?

 $\label{thm:condition} Exactly. See, they still fucking try it on... \ I dunno, traditionally they're things \ I don't shine at...$

What's the worst audition you've ever had?

God. Look, the worst ones were always the American ones, where I would just go in and not do the scene at all, but I'd say to the person who was directing that I was trying to send a message through... You'd just end up with really bemused casting directors who didn't call you back in for anything else. I've had some fucking shockers here years ago. I had one... Fuck... I can't even remember what it's fucking called... Waterworld?

With Kevin Costner?

No, not that one.

Waterland?

Is that by the guy that did *Paris Trout?* Whatever. I did one for him that was pretty fucking unimpressive. I mean, I didn't think it was unimpressive. He did, though. Whatever... Have you seen *Fiery Hawk?*

No...

Go on YouTube and watch Fiery Hawk. That's the best audition piece that I've ever seen. They fucking nailed it. Generally I tell younger actors... y'know... don't.

You had a role in *The New World*. What was Terrence Malick like?

Oh, he's fucking great. He's not like anyone else. Terry comes at it from outside the typical crewing experience, and people who don't come up and through a crew can have very different expectations and a very different way of communicating to the machine of the crew than those who come up through it. He's very private, and that's not something I think that anyone with any regard for him is gonna want to tramp on too much... Look, I've been pretty fortunate.

Can you talk about Ryan Gosling's *How to Catch a Monster*?

I can say that I have no idea where it's at. I can tell you that we went out into the wilds of Detroit... Look, touch wood... I really think we got something

Go to page 10 for details of the LWLies and Jameson Irish Whiskey Presents free preview screening of Starred Up.

Nymphomaniac

Directed by LARS VON TRIER
Starring CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG, STELLAN SKARSGÅRD, STACY MARTIN
Released 22 FEBRUARY

orget all the lurid, sexploitation-based, headline-grabbing marketing images that have been gleefully circulated online. The slimline version (two two-hour volumes instead of the director's preferred five-and-a-half-hour cut) of Lars von Trier's digressive, character-driven odyssey, *Nymphomaniac*, may show a lot of naked fun times, but it is more deeply concerned with loneliness, self-loathing and what becomes of a person whose behaviour takes them beyond the limits of polite society.

Volume One begins on an exquisite snowy evening. Soft powder settles on rooftops in a classically framed montage of establishing shots. Dripping sounds lead the camera down from sky to the alleyway where Joe (Charlotte Gainsbourg) is lying battered and bruised. As in Melancholia, von Trier relishes bookending the grimy world of human suffering with scenes of natural grace.

Seligman (Stellan Skarsgård in his least creepy von Trier role to date) chances upon Joe and takes her back to his sparse bachelor pad for tea, tenderness and, after some coaxing, her life story, which unfolds in eight titled chapters. Between each chapter we return to Joe and Seligman in their single theatrical location, the former arguing that a life dedicated to wild sexscapades has transformed her into a bad person while the latter draws on a well of scholarly knowledge to explain that her behaviour is not abhorrent and has reflections in history, nature and literature. Some of Seligman's parallels are so inventive and recounted with such enthusiasm that the severity of Joe's selflacerating narrative is blown to smithereens in bursts of pure, joyful imagination.

A succession of young actresses — ending in impressive 22-year-old newcomer Stacy Martin — play Joe in the flashbacks for all of *Volume One* and some of *Volume Two*. Joe's nymphomania is presented first as undefined desire, then as the expression of female power, then as a war against love.

"For every 100 crimes committed in the name of love there is only one committed in the name of sex." is the rationale.

Yet, surprisingly (for a film with a poster campaign full of faces during climax) there is a chapter — Jerôme — dedicated exclusively to love, an emotion that discomforts Joe. "Love appeals to the lowest instinct wrapped up in lies," she says. Plain-speaking denunciations of the world's most romanticised emotion create a Herzog-like tone of chaos, especially as Joe seeks solace from her feelings in nature, ruminating on the trees that, somewhat unconvincingly, were beloved of her father (Christian Slater).

Family life is threaded through Volume One in an attempt to root Joe to conventional reality, but it never truly belongs. Joe is a mythic character, a fanciful vessel for fascinating and under-explored psychosexual musings. What if the only truth that mattered was erotic? In Volume One, partly due to the unblemished beauty of Martin and partly because youth is the most forgiving time of anyone's descent into darkness, this truth is photogenic and heartache aside – a markedly jolly ride. Uma Thurman is on fire as a jilted wife and even Shia LaBeouf pulls his weight as a baffled German industrial metallers Rammstein roar over the beginning and end credits and an edited preview of Volume Two stokes anticipation for what is to come.

Volume Two, it turns out, is a darker beast posing darker questions: what if desire for increasingly less palatable gratifications was the only abiding motivation for living? What if these appetites existed in a humane character with the ability to judge themselves? In the clash between superego and id, Nymphomaniac finds a compelling angle even as the flashbacks become more far-fetched and rambling. Of the additional star turns, Jamie Bell is the most memorable, with one hollow-eyed sweep of a stick banishing Billy Elliot from memory.

The dark chemistry that burns between

him and Gainsbourg (who has taken over as Joe) is not shared between her and grating, irrelevant characters, L (Willem Dafoe) and P (Mia Goth). Yet as demanding obscurity takes over in the recollected stories, the recurring scenes between Gainsbourg and Skarsgård continue to sparkle with vitality. It's clear (and LvT has confirmed) that we're witnessing a moral argument between two sides of the *Nymphomaniac* creator's mind. In the hands of his trusted collaborators, it plays out as raw, personal and loaded.

The depiction of sex is at all times a narratively essential illustration of Joe's calling, chronicling the light, dark, funny and painful places that it takes her. 90 minutes are missing from this version and we can only guess at what this feature's worth of missing film adds to the picture. 'Nymphomania' and its clinical alternative label 'sex addiction' are toyed with and it is down to the viewer to decide where the line is between a healthy appetite and something potentially pathological.

The film is not a perfect work and vacillates greatly in quality — particularly in *Volume Two* — but the successful sequences are so rich in thought-provoking representations of big subjects and so distinctively the work of its singular and taboo-flouting director that it remains essential viewing. SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

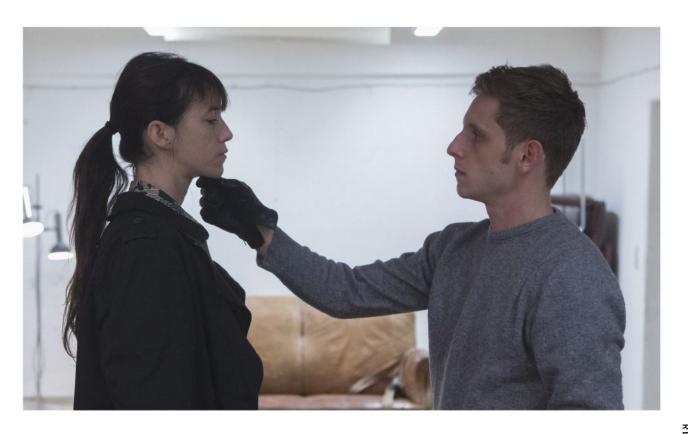
ANTICIPATION. The infamous LvT x graphic nymphomania x entertaining marketing = yes, yes, yes!

5

ENJOYMENT. When it's good, it's very, very good.

4

IN RETROSPECT. A surprising amount of soul for a film supposedly about base sexuality.







The cast of Lars von Trier's sexual epic reveal to *LWLies* what working with the controversial Danish director is really like.

ars von Trier has refused to speak to the media since that incident in Cannes in 2012, meaning his work is now our most direct gauge of the man. Nymphomaniac is highly personal, with lines addressing a judgemental world and lead characters who communicate like two sides of the same brain in conflict. Lest we forget, the distributed two-part four-hour cut also contains graphic flashbacks as Joe tells her would-be saviour, the virgin bachelor Seligman, of her sexual history. LWLies spoke to newcomer Stacy Martin, who plays the young Joe, Stellan Skarsgård aka Seligman and Charlotte Gainsbourg, who takes over as present-day Joe (sans prosthetic vagina), about Western views on sex and working with the inimitable and emotional Lars von Trier.

Charlotte Gainsbourg

LWLies: *Nymphomaniac* is your third movie with Lars. How would you describe the evolution of your work together?

When I met him on Antichrist he was very vulnerable with a lot of anxiety attacks, but then on Melancholia he felt much better and I saw him much happier — and on this one, again, I think he was okay. The scenes were so extreme. I think he knew that I needed help and I really felt that he was holding my hand and accompanying me. It wasn't an easy film to do, so I think our relationship is very trusting. I'm very willing with him. I think now he knows everything about me, physically and what's in my mind. It doesn't go both ways. He's still very, very mysterious to me. Very... unpredictable, and that's what I like.

Joe is such an obsessive person. Where did you connect?

I understood everything about her and I had a lot of empathy for her and I love her very much as a character, but I can't see anything that makes us alike. The cynicism... the darkness she has... are not mine. I really see her as what I imagine of Lars and I think that he put all of himself in Joe and in Seligman. Two opposed people, but who Lars is in his duality.

How do you feel about the fact that it's necessary to release a cut version of the film worldwide?

I think that Lars is okay with this and, as long as he is okay, I'm okay too. The only thing I'm hoping is that people won't feel like they've seen it all.

Stellan Skarsgård

The dialogue between you and Charlotte felt like Lars was talking to Lars.

You're absolutely right. He said himself he'd written two sides of himself but you can tell from the roles which side he's more interested in.

At one point Seligman says "I'm innocent" because he's a virgin. Why do you think we associate virginity with innocence and sexuality with corruption?

That's a good question. I don't know. It has to do with religion and the shamefulness of sexual activity that comes from the Bronze Age religions that are predominant in the Western world. But you could also say that experience is always a loss of innocence and life takes away layer after layer of innocence as you go.

Did Lars tell you why he decided not to talk to the media after Cannes?

It's pretty obvious. He was in a room with journalists that knew him and he felt he was among friends. Everybody knew that he wasn't a Nazi, but he made a Nazi joke and the next day on the front pages of papers all over the world, so even his children on their way to school could see, was the headline 'Lars von Trier: I'm a Nazi'. That was so painful for him. He suddenly realised 'I can't talk to these people as friends,' and if he doesn't feel he can speak freely, then he'd rather not.

You've known Lars since *Breaking the Waves*. Do you remember the man you met then and how has he changed?

Yeah, he had another wife back then. The first

time I met him I went to his house and he said, "I don't like physical contact" so I hugged him. He was trying to get out of my hug and I held him and he relaxed. Now he's a big hugger so he has changed. I truly love him. He's a wonderful man.

Do you know what he wants from you because you've worked together so frequently?

I know what he wants from every actor, which is authentic life. You do scenes in as many different ways as possible to fuck up your tools and let in all the irrationality that creates life. Lars doesn't rehearse and he doesn't even block scenes. You come in and he says 'Start the camera' and then you start doing things and then you do it again, a little differently — or not, if he's happy — it's a very unprepared and relaxed way of working.

Stacy Martin

How does a prosthetic vagina work?

There's about four stages. They put the hard bit on and then a skin layer and then they put the actual prosthetic on and then the hair and then they start painting it a little bit more. It took about three-and-a-half hours and by that time it just feels like you're wearing knickers.

So is everything we see in the film your prosthetic rather than your actual vagina?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was really important to me to be protected and comfortable and Lars knew. I told him from the start, "Lars! I'm not having sex in your movie. I'm having a prosthetic and you told me I was having a porn double. I'm having a porn double." And he was like, "Of course, of course", so that was pretty easy.

Joe identifies sexuality with truth. What do you think of the philosophy that sexuality is pure truth?

Well it's such a primal thing. It's embedded in who we are and I think there is truth in that. That's what I admire in Joe: that she's not ashamed to be a woman and proud of having her own sexuality (§)



The Raid 2

Directed by GARETH EVANS
Starring IKO UWAIS, JULIE ESTELLE, YAYAN RUHIAN
Released 11 APRIL



o one saw it coming. In 2011, an upand-coming director from the Welsh Valleys and an unknown Indonesian Silat star burst onto the action movie scene in a deafening hail of fists and bullets. With its stripped-back arcade game structure, breath-snatching stuntwork and visceral ultraviolence, The Raid hit audiences like a blunt trauma to the head. Now, Gareth Evans and Iko Uwais are back to raise the (crow)bar on the genre all over again. Yet without the element of surprise, and with higher expectations to manage, the question on every fan's lips is: how has Evans approached the follow-up to his blistering tower block Blitzkrieg? The answer, emphatically and perhaps predictably, is without compromise.

Clocking in at close to two-and-a-half hours, everything about *The Raid 2* has been supercharged — from its masterfully choreographed set pieces to its multilayered undercover cop narrative to its vast ensemble of idiosyncratic antagonists. So, that's that. Ante-upped. Job done. Not quite. Because even though it still pays out in multiple orgasms of eye-skewering, cheek-scalding, teeth-shattering, throat-stomping, shin-snapping, spleen-rupturing, lung-ripping

brilliance, this film burns much slower than its predecessor. For a start, the script is more character driven than before. There's more exposition, more dialogue. It remains a popcornspilling assault on the senses, it's just that you have to pay attention if you want to reap its full rewards. Make no mistake, though, this is no rushed overwrite. It's all part of the original plan.

Picking up the story just hours after Rama's (Uwais) bruising retribution, The Raid 2 sets out its stall by bringing Jakarta's criminal underworld into closer focus. Confirming what was subtly alluded to in the preceding chapter — that Rama's initial target was not a spider but merely a small piece of a sprawling web - Evans maps out a dense network of family-run crime syndicates, the most respected of which Rama is ordered to infiltrate in exchange for exoneration for his prior exploits. After successfully ingratiating himself with notorious mob boss Bangun (Tio Pakusadewo), whose supremacy is under threat from various rivals, not to mention his only son and heir, Uco (Arifin Putra), Rama is suddenly forced to rethink his exit strategy.

With so many blades being sharpened and the bodycount rising by the minute, Evans stymies the bloodflow by introducing numerous subplots that occasionally land wide of the mark — a rote backstory concerning returning baddie Yayan Ruhian (who played Mad Dog in the first film but is recast here as an out-of-favour assassin) feels particularly superfluous. Understandably burdened by the need to pull out all the stops, *The Raid 2* is a more measured and self-conscious affair. At certain points it even leans uncomfortably close to self-parody — the chief triple-threat of cartoon henchmen features a twin hammer-wielding mute femme fatale and her steel baseball bat-dragging brother.

Although it may not boast the dizzying bob-and-weave rhythm of the first film, nor the soberingly utilitarian villains, this is a remarkable feat of close-combat spectacle cinema. ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. Deep breath...

5

ENJOYMENT. Longer and more elaborate, but the kicks and punches land with the same bonecrunching force.



IN RETROSPECT. Bring on round three.



Salvo

Directed by FABIO GRASSADONIA, ANTONIO PIAZZA
Starring SALEH BAKRI, LUIGI LO CASCIO, SARA SERRAIOCCO
Released 21 MARCH

abio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza's debut feature is frontloaded with the most impressive action sequence unexpectedly embedded in an arthouse film since the Dardennes dropped a car chase into L'Enfant. Hitman Salvo (Saleh Bakri) and boss Randisi (Mario Pupella) are going about their Sicilian mob business when they drive straight into an ambush. Salvo tells Randisi to stay put, fires off seemingly dozens of cartridges and keeps going to the house of instigator Renato.

From the moment bullets hit the rear window, Daniele Cipri's extraordinarily fluid camera makes FPS over-shoulder video game POV look as good as it ever has, pulling ever so slightly back and forth to make room for maximal suspense and the unnerving possibility of more antagonists arriving. Tension from the big gundown is still coursing as Salvo takes one quiet step after another within Renato's darkened house, culminating with the rival boss's offscreen killing.

The gradual realisation that the movie isn't going to be all action is a comedown. A certain type of viewer's apt to reflexively (tiresomely) complain that any exciting screen violence is a dehumanising atrocity, failing to account for horrific reality. Salvo might be made for

exactly such types, since it pays penance for the initial carnage by draining the energy while conscientiously tracking the continuing moral fallout.

Salvo takes responsibility for Renato's nearly blind sister Rita (Sara Serraiocco), who probably couldn't identify him and hence poses no danger. Randisi obviously isn't going to countenance a potential loose end, so Salvo stashes Rita in an abandoned building and tries to maintain his life as a laconic, stoic hardman. Even accepting the long codified genre requirement that a hired gun embody these attributes, Salvo's endless poker face and inevitable softening is rote rather than iconic. For those who've seen Gomorrah the larger terrain will be familiar, complete with Randisi ominously wheezing his way through dinner in a track suit while explaining the laws of survival. At the beginning the radio speaks of blackouts and fires, with the hell on earth angle subsequently taken for granted.

The opening shot is an amorphous blue blur, one of those puzzle images inviting viewers to guess what sharper focus will reveal. It turns out to be the evening sky seen through blinds: a shot prefiguring the illegible motes-of-light shots from Rita's POV and establishing the 50 shades of blue palette saturating the frame from the setting's sea and sky down to the omnipresent water bottles preferred over tap water. But Salvo's pro forma portent and barely present plot don't provide a sturdy enough scaffolding for consistent visual panache. Grassadonia and Piazza are cinephiles who've spoken of their frustration that the lowbrow comedy is currently the only reliable bet for domestic financing and box office success. Their instinct to go against that grain is understandable. Hopefully their keen eyes will conceive of a more substantive outlet next time around. VADIM RIZOV

ANTICIPATION. The wild and crazy life of an Sicilian hitman goes before the lens. Again.

3

ENJOYMENT. A blistering action opening segues into a more soulful study of life lived by the gun.

3

IN RETROSPECT. Technically strong, though lacks for an original narritive backbone.



Visitors

Directed by GODFREY REGGIO
Starring JEFF POPE, ROB TUNSTALL
Released 4 APRIL

t's been 12 years since reclusive director Godfrey Reggio released a film. Koyaanisqatsi, his 1982 debut, took audiences by force with its striking photography and then-underused techniques such as time-lapse photography and slow motion to explore man's enslavement to technology. Two further films about the encroachment of industry on the natural world completed the 'Qatsi' trilogy, whose imagery has been widely bowdlerised by television advertising ever since.

His latest work is less doctrinal, but a revisiting of the same themes on a microcosmic scale. Rather than airborne camerawork and long takes of landscapes, Reggio closes round his subject and gives us the human face in 4K resolution. All in blackand-white, entirely without dialogue, and — as with all his works — set to a brooding, cyclical score by veteran composer Philip Glass, *Visitors* gets intimate with the individual in the Information Age.

The film consists of only 74 shots, and most of these are long, slow-zooming or -panning takes of between a minute and a minute-anda-half. The first faces we see show barely any trace of movement. They stare straight into the camera, which is a strange experience for an audience since they say nothing, and their composure — or the illusion of it — makes it impossible to read their expressions. If we're asking the question, then they are too: what are you thinking? Reggio's long takes — he calls them "moving stills" — help us to believe that these are living people (if larger than life), and not mere light pictures; that there's some interaction between us and the sitter.

As the faces become more animated, it becomes clear that Reggio's subjects are in thrall to some form of technology - playing video games or watching sport on TV. All that uncanny experience, the sense of an exchange or dialogue, is made a mockery, and it's disappointing. Thankfully, not all of the film's images have this collateral relationship to technology. If much of Visitors feels more closely related to photography than film, a tight frame on a young girl's face as she spins in slow motion on a roundabout is a moment of pure cinema. Partly because of the look of scepticism that plays across her face - or is it scorn? - this sequence reminds us what the moving image is all about, and how the film camera bewildered on its earliest outings among the people, such as the Victorian working-class communities in the films of Mitchell and Kenyon.

In the era of advanced technology, have we, humankind, become like visitors to our own planet? How much more sophistication can the human race withstand? Do we recognise ourselves — even now? The art of *Visitors* lies in estrangement. Reggio makes alien the most ordinary activity: when we watch the hand's manipulation of an optical mouse, with the mouse digitally removed, we pay ourselves a visit. THIRZA WAKEFIELD

ENJOYMENT. Mesmerising. A unique use of the cinema space.	
a proven formula. A long-awaited fourth collaboration.	2
Reggio-Philip Glass partnership is	

IN RETROSPECT. A singular, significant work.

ANTICIPATION The Godfrey



Locke

Directed by STEVEN KNIGHT
Starring TOM HARDY, RUTH WILSON, OLIVIA COLMAN
Released 18 APRIL

ave you ever laid in bed at night, pondering what Abbas Kiarostami's *Ten* would have been like if instead of actress Mania Akbari driving around Tehran and addressing the inequalities rife in modern Iranian society, we had a grizzled Tom Hardy doing a thick, Richard Burton-style Welsh drawl and unleashing his pent-up ire at Irish concrete farmers directly down the hands-free?

Steven Knight's *Locke* just about fulfils its remit as a movie, thanks to a stunning, casually restrained central performance from Tom Hardy as Ivan Locke, an ace building site foreman and family man who has to travel to London to attend to a sorry little accident. A pure dialogue piece that comes across as a clever stage play transposed directly to the big screen, the film consists entirely of Hardy coolly traversing conversation strands, attempting to preserve his crumbling marriage and precarious job in the space of an eventful 90-minute evening jaunt.

The dramatic juggling makes *Locke* feel like a concept episode of *Mission: Impossible*, in which Hardy's steely protagonist — by all accounts a "good man", who's being severely

punished for dropping the ball just this one time — goes to insane lengths to preserve his dignity and self-respect at the expense of just about everything else in his life. In those rare moments where he hasn't got someone on the line, he barks obscenities at an unseen vision of his abusive father in the back seat, (the film's weakest element), suggesting that Knight couldn't rustle up a more subtle way to flesh-out Locke's tragic childhood.

Other than that, the film's concept doesn't get in the way of the central war of words, which, alongside the recent Danish film, A Hijacking, will go down as one of the better works about the psychological nuances of electronic communication. In relation to the concrete-based strand of the story, Knight takes the opportunity to append a neat political dimension to the machinations of the workplace, as our virtuous protagonist is utterly unruffled at the prospect of roping in cash-in-hand immigrant labour to finish the job.

More generally, *Locke* appears to be about the idea of diplomacy and that, to get our own way in complex and heated debates, it's sometimes better to grab for a series of tiny wins rather than a single, gigantic smack-down. It's something of a miracle that Knight manages to protract the material to feature length, though that's more down to Hardy's powerhouse presence than the repetitious lattice of lens-flared motorway lights, the latter nothing more than pretty filler. It's strange that this is being released at the tail-end of 2014 awards season, as Hardy would surely have driven away with a bulging bootful of glimmering silverwear. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Starring Tom Hardy! From the director of Hummingbird...

3

ENJOYMENT. Stunt cinema done right.

4

IN RETROSPECT. Hardy's lead turn proves he's currently one of the most intense and dramatically flexible performers working today.



Tracks

Directed by JOHN CURRAN
Starring MIA WASIKOWSKA, ADAM DRIVER, EMMA BOOTH
Released 25 APRIL

desire to sack-it-all-off and roam — and even to do so alone — is hardly unusual. In fact it's seen by many as a youthful rite-of-passage before settling down to a proper job. What marked Robyn Davidson out as different is the length and hazardousness of her 1977 quest. Aged 26, she took off on a 1,700 mile trek across Australia, travelling from Alice Springs to the west coast, accompanied only by her pet dog and four camels, later writing an account of her journey in the best-seller 'Tracks'.

Robyn (MiaWasikowska) is a Queenslander who determinedly hums her own tune. We join her in 1975 as she prepares for her trek by working on her camel-herding skills. As she readies herself, she's surprised by her friend Jenny (Jessica Tovey) who arrives with a whole bunch of people in tow; Robyn is someone who visibly bristles at the company of her peers, yet this is how she meets Rick Smolan (Adam Driver), an awkwardly garrulous American photographer. His interest in Robyn's adventure secures her funding from National Geographic but, to her irritation, the money is offered on the proviso that she meets and

is photographed by Rick intermittently along the way.

Perhaps appropriately, Tracks is a bit like an issue of the aforementioned magazine set magnificently into motion. Rather than presenting events as a story of survival and extraordinary resolve, Curran focuses instead on that which is pleasing to the eye. Insufficiently immersive, Tracks lets much of the human story and hardship fall by the wayside, with episodes of peril and loneliness captured too briefly. However, the film's infatuation with the awesome landscape does reap some rewards, with Mandy Walker's cinematography revelling in the bountiful natural textures. Walker draws out the variety from these seemingly samey, never-ending environs - the cracked coral-coloured earth, the fine blonde sand, Robyn's scorched red skin all conspiring to communicate a ferocious heat that seems to rebound off the screen.

Unfortunately Marion Nelson's script fails to capture this most singular and independent of women, sketching Robyn (fleeting flashbacks aside) and leaving the diligent Wasikowska to fill in the blanks. Curran's film doesn't dare dwell on the time Robyn

would have spent alone, keeping its runtime short and pushing Robyn's interactions with others to the fore — though this does give an impression of a desire for solitude constantly thwarted, an earnest attempt to disappear from sight which actually attracts attention and earns her the unflattering nickname of "Camel Lady".

Pristine and accessible when it should be challenging, dirty and bold, *Tracks* evokes this incredible woman's fairly insane adventure, but fails to really smack its audience round the gob. Beautiful landscapes are all well and good, but this is one film that really could've done with a touch of crazy. EMMA SIMMONDS

ANTICIPATION. Mia Wasikowska is generally one to watch.

3

ENJOYMENT. Depends how much you like camels.

3

IN RETROSPECT. Superficially dazzles but lacks insight and idiosyncrasy.



Wake in Fright (1971)

Directed by TED KOTCHEFF
Starring DONALD PLEASENCE, GARY BOND, CHIPS RAFFERTY
Released 7 MARCH

ith its heat-bleached palette, soundtrack of buzzing flies, and scene upon scene of matted faces swilling can upon can of West End lager, Wake in Fright is perhaps the most dehydrating experience in all cinema. Set in the Australian Outback, where a smugly urbane schoolteacher is pulled into heart-of-darkness booze-ups and kangaroo hunts, the film is about a no-exit inferno — though the hell is perhaps not the hypermacho outpost of Bundanyabba, but rather masculinity itself.

A close adaptation of Australian novelist Kenneth Cook's debut — derived from his experiences as an outsider in Broken Hill, the mining town where much of the film was shot — Wake in Fright, with its Canadian director and Brit topliners, was notorious among an Australian audience divided over its portrait of animalistic "mateship." After decades out of circulation, the film returns to us in a version restored from negatives saved from the brink of incineration in a Pittsburgh warehouse, and still radiates an uncomfortable heat.

As John Grant, deployed unwillingly to a town consisting of two buildings bisected by railroad tracks and surrounded by arid void, Gary Bond has the lips, the desert-foxy blond hair, and the supercilious entitlement of Peter O'Toole as TE Lawrence. En route to Sydney for the Christmas holiday, an overnight stop in "the Yabba" turns indefinite when he overestimates his mastery of the "nice, simple-minded" backroom two-up game. Money gone, suitcases full of books soon left behind in a bar, he experiences the local hospitality as a spiral of twist-my-arm binges ("What's the matter with him? He'd rather talk to a woman than drink?"), horseplay edging into wanton property destruction and brute struggle for dominance, and morning-after fry-ups of kangaroo testicles. Grant's guide on his antihero's journey is Doc Tydon, played by Donald Pleasence with watery blue eyes horribly wide. Tydon is Grant's looking-glass double, playing opera records in a shack with no plumbing, civilised impulses reconstituted as party tricks (demonstrating peristalsis, he drinks a beer standing on his head, foam and spittle flecking his beard). Tydon drinks as desperately as anyone in the Yabba - but knows why.

Kotcheff, who let loose red dust and flies in the studio interiors, alternates blackout cuts with direct light as scalding as a hangover sun. He also took pains, he has lately emphasised, not to participate in or compel the deaths of kangaroos. Wake in Fright's most notorious scenes were filmed on a ridealong with professional roo hunters, and the outtakes were handed over to the RSPCA for use in their campaigns. The beery hunt sequence is a massacre to rival the era's Vietnam Westerns, though when Grant takes on a kangaroo with a knife, lit by a spotlight mounted on a Ford Fairlane and roared on by his new mates, it is surely the climax of a less specific, more primal allegory. The title comes from a curse: "May you dream of the devil and wake in fright." But here, the devil is you, and it's not a dream but a memory. MARKASCH

ANTICIPATION. After decades of exile, an Aussie cult classic staggers onto the revival circuit.

4

ENJOYMENT. Water! Water!

4

IN RETROSPECT. Perhaps slightly schematic in charting the descent of man, but it induces a sweat that's hard to wash off.



The Unknown Known

Directed by ERROL MORRIS Starring DONALD RUMSFELD Released 21 MARCH

n Errol Morris' The Unknown Known, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld serves as the sole talking head in a documentary about his life and career. In essence Morris has repeated the same formula from his 2003 doc The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S McNamara, except that unlike the reflective McNamara, Rumsfeld breezily, near-gleefully takes on a brusque, no-bullshit bravado in response to Morris' caustic questions.

It proves difficult to crack the Rumsfeld nut: he has an answer for everything, and even when it is unsatisfactory, Rumsfeld is wont to simply deny accepted facts about the war and assert innocence about others, like the torture linkages between Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. When Rumsfeld claims more contentious ideas, the film visually underscores the gravity of Rumsfeld's words. "It would have been so much easier if you could treat people the same, as prisoners of war" says Rumsfeld in voiceover as the film briefly presents footage of distraught detainees. With these subtle (and sometimes notso-subtle) ironic flashes. The Unknown Known renders Rumsfeld's words hollow, demonstrating that the former Secretary of Defense is unable to explain the complexity of the situation.

Morris'interestinseekingtruththroughhis subjects has always served a broader purpose. While he fails to get Rumsfeld to crack up about the controversial aspects of the war, that shouldn't be considered a failure on Morris' part - especially considering Rumsfeld's known talents in elocution. To describe Morris' interrogation of Rumsfeld as unsatisfactory would miss the broader ideas presented in the film, like the politician's reliance on obtaining clear definitions of words (including "victory" and "terrorism") as a persuasion tactic for the military presence in Iraq (some words are naturally more apt and targeted for Rumsfeld's stance than others).

The film also keeps returning to his now-infamous soundbite about the lack of evidence of Iraq supplying terrorist groups with weapons of mass destruction: "There are known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. These are the things we do not know we don't know." In one of his many millions of memos, this statement includes an additional

clause: "There are also unknown knowns... Things that you think you know, that it turns out you did not." When defining "unknown known" on camera, Rumsfeld ends up describing the opposite and realises his memo might be "backwards." He posits it should be, "things that you possibly may know that you don't know that you know." The point of this scene is not to ridicule Rumsfeld but to illustrate his lack of awareness about his lack of knowledge. Even when describing the unknown known, Rumsfeld can't help but turn into an unknown known himself. TINA HASSANNIA

ANTICIPATION. An unofficial sequel to The Fog of War.

4

ENJOYMENT. Rumsfeld's recollections of American military history are unique and gripping.

4

IN RETROSPECT. Not intended to simply ridicule Rumsfeld, but to underscore the complexity of one of the toughest jobs in the world.





ขั้าไฟ

A film by KIM MORDAUNT

THEROCKET

IN CINEMAS 14TH MARCH







The Zero Theorem

Directed by TERRY GILLIAM
Starring CHRISTOPH WALTZ, MÉLANIE THIERRY, DAVID THEWLIS
Released 14 MARCH

here's an irony at the core of Terry Gilliam's cinema. He is a self-professed enemy of the banal and has fought tooth and nail to make films that exist just outside of the crystalline bubble of bland mainstream acceptability. And yet, his instantly recognisable brand of baroque steampunk fantasia has become a kind of creative crutch — like his very concept of originality has itself become as production-line ready as a can of Coke.

With his latest, *The Zero Theorem* — a follow-up to the unfairly maligned *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* — he has fashioned a kind of visual, aural and intellectual trove of Gilliamana, referencing Bruce Willis' bald goon from *Twelve Monkeys*, the luscious animation from his Python days and a sense of grubby clockwork wonder from pretty much everything else. Oh, and the plot comes (part and parcel) from *Brazil*.

Christoph Waltz, taking a rare saunter into the headline-billing, plays neurotic, hairless corporate drone Qohen Leth, whose existence consists almost solely of sitting at a flashing retro-futurist computer terminal and crunching data for his shady corporate overseers, Mancom. His manual processes, which appear to involve small phials of neon green and red liquid, are never explained. The tangle of mainframes and neural connections all seem so rote as to suggest that explanation is irrelevant: we should already know all of this from other movies.

His exemplary track record as a worker bee has led "Management" to allow him that most cherishable of graces: to continue his work in the comfort of his home, which happens to be a rat-infested, fire-damaged chapel acquired cheaply in an insurance fire-sale. His new task, though, is proving a much touted brain-teaser named the Zero Theorem, an equation purported to prove that, essentially, the universe is empty, existence is meaningless and we're all going to be sucked into oblivion at any moment. His one ray of hope is a phone call he's expecting from some nebulous deity who apparently has all the answers he's seeking. The call did come once, only for Qohen to accidentally drop the receiver in excitement.

The film chronicles Qohen's gradual descent into confusion and liberation as he slowly discovers the hidden agenda behind his impossible assignment. Anyone who's seen Gilliam's (superior) *Brazil* will know the Orwellian score, and its broad satire of faceless, imperious bureaucracy is comfort-zone filmmaking at its purest.

Yet this is probably the director's most cogent and crisp work in some time, its simple narrative drive towards discovering the true nature of the Zero Theorem helping to allay some of the structural rot of his more indulgent, freeform and episodic features of the past. Waltz's character is basically Sam Lowry Mk II, and his befuddled and anxiety-inflected

performance manages to draw similar levels of empathy towards this cowering rat trapped in the corporate maze.

Appealing supporting turns arrive from Mélanie Thierry as a buxom online prostitute, and Lucas Hedges as an motor-mouthed teen computer whiz. Even Tilda Swinton turns up as a web therapist who, at one point, starts to wrap her diagnoses in a thick Scottish drawl (but not before tearing all of her hair out). It's great that Gilliam is still interested in gigantic themes and righteously angry about any and all forms of corporate hectoring. The film flops around like a drunk fish during its closing segments and we're bombarded with tricksy rhetoric as a way to blast through to end of the film. And yet, Gilliam leaves us with a delightful final shot, assuring us that as long as we retain our imaginations, everything will be A-OK. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. It's always worth seeing what Gilliam's been tinkering with.

ENJOYMENT. Dazzles intermittently, irks occasionally.

3

IN RETROSPECT. Kind of works despite itself.



Exhibition

Directed by JOANNA HOGG
Starring VIV ALBERTINE, LIAM GILLICK, TOM HIDDLESTON
Released 25 APRIL

f, as the saying goes, home is where the heart is, then in Exhibition it is also sanctuary to the mind, body and soul. Uncommonly attuned to gradations between cognitive existence and physical experience, British director Joanna Hogg's third feature turns aesthetic determinism into a narrative framework by which action directly corresponds with the surrounding environment. The film's simple story, concerning a husband and wife in the process of selling their home of many years, is rendered complex by an internal compositional logic which reflects tremors among the couple and their modernist surroundings alike. In Exhibition, architecture translates as the physical, psychological and emotional infrastructure of its characters - one seemingly cannot advance without altering the material identity of the other.

The film opens and closes in curiously similar fashion, with the character of the wife, known only as D (played by Viv Albertine of British post-punk legends the Slits), contorting herself around inanimate constructions throughout the house. Her husband, H (Liam Gillick), seems the more pragmatic of the two, accommodating brokers (including one played by Tom Hiddleston) and working diligently as a conceptual artist in his home office. When not folding herself around various objects, D, also an artist, spends her time

working out performance pieces which invariably devolve into either exhibitionist displays for her neighbours or exercises in personal pleasure. She's frustrated — sexually, professionally and emotionally. She shuts down H's intimate advances only to satisfy herself as he sleeps quietly by her side. Her life appears to be one elaborate artistic display, except there's an unsettling hollowness to her gestures that suggests an unspoken longing.

Hogg doesn't disclose much regarding the motivation of her characters. She instead reflects the dynamic (or lack thereof) of the central relationship in formal shorthand. Consistently static, askew and carefully diagrammed, her compositions carry a simultaneously elusive and expressive quality. In Hogg's hands, every surface is both a literal and figurative mirror; space is expanded in many instances by reflections in glass, marble, and aluminum façades. More is said in Hogg's impressively precise mise-en-scène than in any of the dialogue, which is as sparse as the film's interiors. Few recent films have approached matters of anatomical and psychological integrity as democratically as Exhibition.

But what of all this aesthetic dedication—to what ends is Hogg working here? Formally, Exhibition has much in common with works of classic formalism, particularly Rossellini's films with Ingrid Bergman in the early 1950s (Stromboli, Europe '51, Journey to Italy) and

Antonioni's output during his structuralist period (La Notte, L'eclisse), but it lacks the gravity acquired by those films as they subjected their characters to volatile new environments. Exhibition is thus perhaps more reminiscent of the ongoing Greek New Wave, in which films such as Attenberg, Alps and Miss Violence utilise compositional austerity to actualise the severe internal makeup of their characters. Unlike many of those films, however, Exhibition is able to locate a vital human warmth in its precision. The consequences of their impending transition may be left just out of purview, but audience's characters in Exhibition, like all of Hogg's output thus far, leave one intensely curious for more. JORDAN CRONK

ANTICIPATION. Joanna Hogg's third feature appears to build on her well regarded earlier work.

3

ENJOYMENT. Exhibition

approaches matters of anatomical and psychological integrity in determined, democratic fashion.

4

IN RETROSPECT. Hogg's best film to date.



A Story of Children and Film

Directed by MARK COUSINS
Released 4 APRIL

his mouth," says Mark Cousins, gravely. Ben and his sister Laura are Cousins' young nephew and niece. The children have spent a relaxed morning building a marble run in their pyjamas. The only unusual thing is, Uncle Mark has set up a stationary camera to detect their emotions, using them as a hook for themed clip packages of cinema's children. Shyness, theatricality and sulkiness are among the abstract filing categories that give shape to this good-natured and enjoyable collage documentary.

A Story of Children and Film is the 'does exactly what it says on the tin' follow-up to Cousins' celebrated 15-hour television series The Story of Film. It is a film to divert and entertain and remind people why cinema is great. It is also hopelessly niche and feels slightly rote for a critic who knows his stuff, but has made little effort to structure his film creatively. We see Laura and Ben emoting over their marble run, we see clips. We see Laura and Ben emoting over their marble run, we see clips. You get the picture.

This is alleviated by the stream of truly great clips that span place - from Iran to Japan - and time - from The Kid to Moonrise Kingdom - from mainstream classics like E.T. to little-seen masterpieces like Boudewijn Koole's Kauwboy. 53 films are incorporated and there's not a dud among them. Cousins curates his material with an accessibility born of passion, filled with information and delivered like a free-form slam poet. When he explains that a scene is shot with alternating reverse-shot camera angles to convey an intense exchange, it's a bonafide tidbit for non-technicians to take away. There are enough moments like this to enable attentive minds to skim off filmmaking savvy without bogging down what feels like a fleetfooted sprint.

The speed and turnover of clips is both the film's premise and its undoing. Richness lingers in every piece of film footage and it's a wrench to be pulled from the worlds they imply and back to Cousins' flimsy overarching thesis. To recap: that's Laura and Ben playing with marbles, demonstrating that children experience varying emotions. Cousins' lilting Northern

Irish voice commentates on his sister's kids as if they are an exotic strain of mongoose found doing something unexpected in a forest glade. The contrast between his po-faced scholasticism and these ordinary little people is marked. "People have often seen lots in a small thing," justifies Mark, folding in tenuous bookends about artist Vincent Van Gogh's inspirations.

A Story of Children and Film is a wonderful and wise guide, with ample ammunition for any film-lover's 'to see' list. It would be childish to complain about the teacher's technique, if only childishness wasn't so gleefully on message. SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. Mark Cousins is a respected critic with the knowledge to back it up.

3

 ${\bf ENJOYMENT.}\ \textit{Very enjoyable}.$

4

IN RETROSPECT. Intrusive curation dominates in the rearview mirror.

Mark Cousins

The critic, cinephile, mountain climber and literary polymath talks to LWLies about his clip-based film essay A Story of Children and Film.

LWLies: How did you first get into movies?

Cousins: When I was a kid there were no books in our house. No film books, certainly. I remember finding Halliwell's Film Guide in the school library and I read it like a novel. I started at the beginning and remember reading about The Old Dark House and Hitchcock's Notorious and just imagining the films from the brief description. And the number of stars. And becoming familiar with the names of certain cinematographers, like you would characters in a story. So I've always had a sense of longing for cinema. I'd read about Citizen Kane 10 years before I saw it. That's 10 years of desire.

This film is like a thematic daisy-chain of clips. When you watch movies, are you always making mental connections with other movies?

I have always been good at form. If someone asks me the plot of a movie, I hardly ever remember. Storylines and psychology, no. But I've always been good at the shape of movies. If I see a film, I feel I can draw the shape of it on paper. With this film, I became interested in what happens when you remove the story from a film. If you try to take the story right down to zero like Ozu or Rossellini or Bresson used to do, then what are you left with? You go through moods. So here we have shyness and class and aggression. When we're editing, we usually have a big timeline painted on the wall. But with this film, there was no timeline. Here we had a painting by Paul Cezanne ripped from a book and stuck on the wall. It's just a series of blobs, and that's what I wanted to capture with this film.

When you filmed your niece and nephew, was that intuitive?

Oh, yes. I film every day, all the rubbish and shit that I see. I never know if I'll use it. I had no



intention of making a film about children, but I found this and it contained things I didn't notice when I was actually filming. I saw their shyness and their violence and thought I could use them as a springboard for the film. I think cinema is good on children. I argue that some of the properties of children are in cinema, and vice versa. Like, the rapidity of emotional change a child can go from angry to happy almost like a film edit.

Like with The Story of Film, this film takes a truly global view of cinema.

A lot of people told me that they found The Story of Film very personal or subjective, and I'd usually say that the true subjectivity is a film historian who writes about cinema and includes Casablanca and The Godfather but doesn't touch African cinema or Asian cinema. They don't touch it because they haven't seen it.

How do you watch movies? What's the mental process for you?

I don't watch movies looking for moments. It's more that I "clock" them. Once I decided to make this film. I produced this graph where I wrote down the themes from all the movies I was watching, so I was very specifically looking for scenes to use. More specifically, I just "clock" things. I remember watching Inception and knowing, knowing that there were scenes in it that were similar to Jean Cocteau's Le Sang d'un Poète. I didn't make a note, you could just see it there. I have a good memory for that kind of stuff.

How aware are you of your own image?

I don't think about how I'm perceived, as that way madness lies. I know that the things I like doing - climbing hills, dancing, swimming, playing in rock pools - are quite child-like. I don't sit still. Adults can sit and talk in restaurants. I hate restaurants. I get bored stiff. I need constant stimulation. I don't know why I like watching a Béla Tarr film so much, but I do. Joseph Campbell talks about the rapture of cinema. I love the ambiguity of cinema. You're there and you're not there. You're Marilyn Monroe and you're with Marilyn Monroe. You're the person and in love with the person. There's so much going on that I can't sit still.

You have many cinephile tattoos. Are they a recent thing?

They're sort of recent. I got a tattoo that says, 'WB', Walter Benjamin. Then the second tattoo is on my cock which is the name of a beach where I spent a week in India and had a brilliant time. Then I had the Eistenstein tattoo which was for the end of The Story of Film. Subsequent tattoos are names of filmmakers I love and stuff like that.

Are you building yourself into a shrine?

I love tattoos. I love that they're for life 🚳



The Past

Directed by ASGHAR FARHADI
Starring BÉRÉNICE BEJO, TAHAR RAHIM, ALI MOSAFFA
Released 28 MARCH

ran's Asghar Farhadi reveals himself (once again) as both a great humanist and a dab hand at building characters whose complex psychological motivations are always bracingly, harrowingly credible. This follow-up to awards darling, A Separation, again mines the dramatic moments between moments, the sticky emotional sinews that simply won't tear when two people have apparently parted ways. He comprehends and pre-empts the disparity between what people say and what they really mean, how the act of conversing with a loved one (or an ex-loved one) can become a minefield of semantic second-guessing, and how human relations are composed of perhaps little more than people relaying banal information between one another.

The Past opens on a joke, but only one that you'll get if you're familiar with Farhadi's thematic preoccupations. Bérénice Bejo's harried, bleary-eyed mother-of-two Marie is waiting behind a glass window at a Parisian airport for Ali Mosaffa's Ahmad (her softly-spoken, Iranian ex-husband) so they can finalise their divorce. He sees Bejo and wanders up to the window to greet her. They mouth

words to one another but nothing can be heard. Yet they have total comprehension of each others' intentions. The irony of this fleeting moment feels all the more cruel when placed against the blistering and complex drama that ensues — perfect, unequivocal clarity of communication, achieved only when words are not there to get in the way of things.

Farhadi's film tooth-combs over a brief period in which Marie is attempting to firmly sever a tie with her past so she can move freely into her future. That future is with Samir (Tahar Rahim), a dry-cleaner whose wife is in a coma and who isn't sure quite what the etiquette is for upping sticks and moving on. So much happens in the film that a more detailed plot précis would be utterly worthless. Farhadi is far more interested in delivering a broader thesis relating to the emotional ripple effect of traumatic experiences and the way people gauge whether it's right to hurt those close to them if it may be for the greater good.

Technically, it's very straight and tight, with only a handful of stylistic flourishes to take you momentarily out of the drama (including an extremely moving long final shot).

The Past is more muted and Bergmanesque than A Separation and less playfully academic than his 2009 film, About Elly. The deep browns and beiges of the colour scheme perfectly convey the muddiness of the situation, while the pacing gets more frantic as matters accordion out in all directions. The title offers a (thuddingly?) blunt encapsulation of the film's basic theme: that however hard you try to expunge it, the past will remain with you always and forever. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Will the director of A Separation do the double?

4

ENJOYMENT. This is dramatic film writing of the highest order.

4

IN RETROSPECT. Extremely moving when taken at face value, extremely impressive as a piece of immaculate cinematic craft.



On Set... With Jacques Gites

Dispatch Number One: Todd Holland's *The Wizard*. 13 August, 1988 — Los Angeles.

n 1988, I was in Los Angeles as a stringer for the Danish cinephile quarterly 'Klappabörd' when I ran into my old friend, the actress Amanda Pays. Mandy always appreciated my critical understanding of her movie Oxford Blues, with Rob Lowe, and really held me responsible for getting it recognised as a classic — so, as usual, she had a great tip for me. A guy she'd worked with on a film about a man stuck in a computer, a director by the name of Todd Holland, was shooting a ground-breaking story examining disability and sibling devotion and, it turned out, would be happy to have me on set to watch the magic as it happened.

The picture was called *The Wizard*, and it was really out of leftfield; but what struck me then about Todd, as it still does when we chat, is how unafraid he is of unlimitlessness. Here was a brave premise, which in the late '80s no-one would have thought could do any business at all: a road movie about two brothers — one a tough-talking but protective wise-guy, the other a high-functioning autistic gaming savant — discovering America and rediscovering themselves. To me, it sounded like [words on tape muffled and indistinct].

All of the desert scenes in *The Wizard* were filmed at Pinewood Studios, England. Back then, this place had the best technicians in the world (and still would if not for the government's mad tax system), and is where I pitched up a few days later. Todd was just framing up a pivotal scene, at a corner shop in the Nevada wilderness, where the slow boy hammers away on a video game about killing street thugs and thus displays his preternatural talent.



It was a tough shoot for the crew, as the kids had to subtly assay their realisation that the boy wasn't normally disabled but specially disabled and a probable source of surplus income. On the other hand, the scene shouldn't be exploitative.

Luckily, the production was blessed with some fine young actors. The slow boy was actually all right: it was simple acting by the underrated Luke Edwards, while the girl the brothers' meet on the road is brought to thrilling life by 13-year-old Jenny Lewis. She was tasked with delivering the line, "Tm telling you, I know truckers," while avoiding getting the film saddled with a tricksy R-rating. Sadly for cineastes, Jen later followed her father into the music business, became a pop star and married a rap singer. Hip to be square, indeed!

The kids, though, were out-played by the small actor Fred Savage, who played the brain-

right boy with such childlike verité you would have sworn he actually was a child. We never got to chat as he was tied up with his vocal coach, Peter Lambert, during my visit. At that time, Freddy still had trouble maintaining that famous American twang and often his broad Somerset burr would come through. Later, in his TV roles, you hardly noticed it and by the time they made the Wonder Years movie, Capturing the Friedmans, he'd lost it completely. On the set of The Wizard, though, Freddy had to put up with endless 'oo-arr'ing from the mostly British crew. He took the ribbing cheerfully, unless his height was mentioned, when he could become remorselessly violent.

Understandably, Todd was far too deep in his creative mindcave to speak to me directly but he did send me a couple of Post-It notes via a runner. Post-Its were still in their infancy at the time, so you can imagine how touched I was by his gesture — and those sticky bits of paper were my passport to the movie's real "Wizard", special effects maestro Kasey Holbine. Kase had cut his teeth on the *Star Wars Holiday Special* and now invited me to see his latest creation: a mind-blowing "glove" that became the film's most famous image. To this day, people still say, "Hey, it's the 21st century! Weren't we promised glove things with gamepads on them in that film?!".

Of course, back then you could walk into any producers office in Hollywood and say "I want to make a film based on a violent children's toy" and you'd walk out with a contract. Today, that movie would simply never get made (**)

The Grand Budapest Hotel

Directed by WES ANDERSON
Starring RALPH FIENNES, TONY REVOLORI, SAOIRSE RONAN
Released 7 MARCH

es Anderson made a credit card commercial back in 2004 in which he satirised the jodphur-sporting, bull-horn wielding autocrat that forms our romantic conception of what a film director is and how he/she operates. Anderson himself starred in the amusing short and is seen sashaying around a movie set as toadying flunkies fall at his feet so that he may personally anoint their creative proposals.

This motif — the single heroic figure flanked by his loyal charges — has since appeared in Fantastic Mr. Fox, Moonrise Kingdom and now forms the ideological core for his predictably delightful new work, The Grand Budapest Hotel. We may have inferred spurious behavioural similarities between Max Fisher, Royal Tennenbaum or Steve Zissou in the director himself — characters as an extension of the creator's personality, as the auteurists would have it — yet this latest work appears wholly obsessed with the mechanics and logistics of Anderson's experience writing and directing movies.

The film is a fleet-footed, ultra ornate mittel-European caper with all retro fittings in place and bursts of cartoonish macabre filling in where the Martini dry humour once was. And here the genteel, syllableheavy olde world dialogue is written to dovetail with the customarily meticulous production design and Robert Yeoman's snowglobe framing. Cinematic references range from Lubitsch, Murnau, Von Sternberg and famed German silhouette animator, Lotte Reiniger, right through to Kubrick (particularly The Shining), while the film is said to be primarily inspired by the writings of Austrian literary stylist, Stefan Zweig. The delicate wordplay in the script feels, if not purloined from Zweig's pages, then certainly studiously and fondly recalibrated for the big screen Anderson's customary reverence.

Subtle pangs of melancholy permeate every immaculate frame, even as the plot barrels along at a more spritely pace than usual. This melancholy arrives in its opening frames when a young woman hangs a hotel key on a memorial bust and begins reading from a hardback entitled 'The Grand Budapest Hotel'.

Once we are two, three layers and two aspect ratios removed from contemporary reality (or Anderson's slightly less geometrically precise vision of contemporary reality), we are introduced to the world of this baroque mountaintop spa hotel, lorded over by the obscenely devoted and motor-mouthed concierge M Gustave (Ralph Fiennes) and his pencil-mustachio'd lobby boy-cum-protégé, Zero (Tony Revolori).

If Gustave - barking orders, maintaining standards, holding the future of the establishment in the palm of his hand - is the Anderson manqué, then the eponymous grand hotel stands in for his idiosyncratic brand of cinema. He doesn't so much have supporting players in the film as he does an extended family of cherished guests who he invites to stay for a while, relax and soak up the ambience: French It girl Léa Seydoux has a part as a maid which may as well be non-speaking; Owen Wilson plays one of M Gustave's concierge brethren and gets a line (if not a laugh); even Tilda Swinton makes a flying visit to Wesworld, caked in gristly prosthetics as an ageing dowager who drops dead after her first and only scene, her passing acting as deus ex machina for an elaborate art heist involving the whereabouts of the apocryphal, priceless chef d'oeuvre, 'Boy With Apple'.

Although the murmurings of European conflict can be heard in the backdrop of all the cross-country capering, Anderson co-opts the period's social rather than political detail. Accent-wise, Fiennes does a loquacious spin on his English Patient but peppered with bizarre Americanisms ("goddamn!") and fruity sign-offs ("darling").

The baddies of the piece, brothers Dmitri (Adrien Brody) and Jopling (Willem Dafoe, replete with Max Schreck-style lower-jaw fangs), have a mild Germanic lilt, while there is French dialogue from Seydoux and Mathieu Amalric. Saoirse Ronan (as Zero's pastry-chef fiancé with facial scar) retains an Irish twang, just to keep things interesting. This geographical melting pot helps to maintain a sense of fantastical distance, reminding us constantly that a movie is a

whimsical fabrication of reality — and that we are watching a movie.

Anderson often prizes in-the-moment emotion over contrived drama, though with this film you feel that tricks are sometimes being missed. There is a mystery element to the plot - Who's got the painting? Where's the second will? - though Anderson always opts for telling you how something is going to happen first, allowing you to watch and soak up the rich aesthetic detail. In one sequence the family lawyer, Kovacs (Jeff Goldblum), is chased around an art gallery by a knifewielding Jopling, his fate seemingly predestined. The frame is there as much to show as it is to conceal, and one wonders if the film could not have been supercharged by simply allowing a few blank spaces for the audience

Even though from the outset *The Grand Budapest Hotel* announces itself as a jolly trifle, its cumulative power catches you daydreaming. Anderson has this innate ability to shoot a moment through with intense sadness through a repetition, a realisation or a tonal remove. The finale of the story is largely upbeat, but then we are back dragged back through time, through literary devices, through narrators, interpretations and dreamworlds and back into the snow-swept reality of the girl stood alone, clutching the hotel key. This sadness derives not from the fact that the story has come to an end, but that it was all just a story in the first place. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. It's been barely two years since Moonrise

Kingdom, but you can't keep a good Wes-head down.

ENJOYMENT. A sparkling effort with an utterly endearing lead turn from Ralph Fiennes.

IN RETROSPECT. An opulent and elaborate cartoon romp that exists under a deep ocean of Andersonian melancholy. _







We Are the Best!

Directed by LUKAS MOODYSSON
Starring MIRA BARKHAMMAR, MIRA GROSIN, LIV LEMOYNE
Released 18 APRIL

Stockholm, 1982. Best buds Bobo (Mira Barkhammer) and Klara (Mira Grosin) are surrounded by very annoying people: girls with princess-y hair and sharp tongues, teachers who make them do sport, parents who have drunken parties and play the clarinet in their underpants. So they react like any spirited, alt-culture-embracing 13-year-olds would and form a punk band. It doesn't matter that neither of them can play an instrument. It's more punk to start with nothing.

Hedwig (Liv LeMoyne) is a loner Christian from the year above. And, what's more, a talented guitar player and singer. The ease with which the children befriend each other is communicated through a script that shows astute understanding of the bones of youthful interaction. Bobo and Klara court Hedwig with guileless energy, managing to say as many offensive things as nice ones in their straight-talking, giggly way. Hedwig (who is actually the coolest of the bunch) gets involved anyway.

Moodysson casts a spell by presenting events from a knee-high perspective, moving the camera around with a kineticism that reflects the energy of his small but passionate stars. 'Rehearsals' and 'performances' are the (drum) beating heart of the story, the place where the trio, who are temperamentally very different, become complementary parts of the same entertaining whole, united in their stance against boring convention. Their shifting moods set the tone, switching from hyper to calm and back again in seconds. After Hedwig sings sweetly to her new friends, the rare oasis of silence is followed by outpourings of affection. Then, moments later, everyone's moved on to tunelessly bashing instruments.

This youthful capacity to be totally immersed in life one wildly different moment to the next is splashed across the film. Boys, play fights, real fights and — that niche classic — sneaking booze from an older brother's party and throwing up on his records are also incorporated. Dramas and betrayals that would cause a serious rift among older friends are overcome. The collective point-of-view is sometimes abandoned, for instance when we go home with Bobo. Adult issues exist for her there but by plugging into headphones, she keeps them at a distance. The childhood bubble of

innocence and enthusiasm stays afloat for her and for us.

This touching and tender tribute to an all-too-transitory time in life marks a lighter turn from Moodysson after the dramatic bleakness he's been channelling since 2002's horrific sex-trafficking tragedy Lilya-4-Ever. We Are the Best! is adapted from a graphic novel written by his wife, Coco, who seems instrumental to this about-turn. "He had been writing gloomy books about his dead dad," said she of Lukas prior to this film. Given Moodysson's attachment to darkness, this small and surprising delight seems even brighter. SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. It's hard to know what Lukas Moodysson is about these days.

3

ENJOYMENT. Childhood is the best!

4

IN RETROSPECT. A joyful bubble you'll want to re-enter.

Lukas Moodysson

Sweden's greatest living director tells *LWLies* why he chose to rekindle the youthful exhuberance of his early career with new film *We Are the Best!*

LWLies: Do you see your movies in shades of light and dark?

Moodysson: There's a wall between literature and film and people writing about literature and film. Most of them forget that I started writing poetry and then I wrote a novel and only then did I write some movies. They just see the movies. That's okay, but I feel like there is some kind of restlessness. I'm trying to be honest. Sometimes I wake up and put on the radio and hear that terrible things are happening in the world and I have to respond to that. Sometimes life is like gold and you have to relate to that. Life is enormously diverse and rich.

Do you make positive, affirmative art when you are feeling positive and affirmative?

No, more like the opposite. It's not like that, because if you work on a film you have to retain the feeling of life being golden for, like, two years. And that's just not gonna happen. The better you feel, the more you can take in the more difficult things. For most people, if you've had a stressful week, you want to watch a simple, funny movie. When I'm overloaded by the world, I wanted to make simple, funny movies.

Did you ever have people asking you to make simple, funny movies when you were deep in your dark phase?

No, not really. But that's just because I don't have that many friends.

How long has We Are the Best! been with you as an idea?



The graphic novel upon which it was based was written by Coco, my wife, in 2008. Also, when she was making the book, I felt it could be a movie. It didn't really happen at that time.

Why did it take so long?

I had to do some other things. Life goes up and down. There were some other things I had to write.

What do you mean by "had to"?

Personal projects. No, nothing to do with people telling me to write something. I never listen to them. No.

Why did you make this film now?

I don't know. I was standing in the kitchen of my

house in the countryside which we inherited from my father. I just felt like — yep, I had to make this film. It was really just a moment where it fell into my head. I don't make conscious decisions. I just grab at things in the dark.

Was your wife involved in the production of the film?

No, it was more like she said, "if you take this bit or that bit out, I will take my name off the credits". But she was quite open. She said that she was happy about it as I had spent too much time writing sad things. I would often call her to give advice about casting or costumes or locations.

Has your wife always been a confidente on your films?

Yeah. But then I want to kill her afterwards.

Is she brutal?

Not brutal, just like me. She's like me in that she's interested in the details more than stories. Our discussions are about what haircuts people should have as it says a lot about a human being.

How do you know something is funny when you're filming it?

I don't. I definitely don't. Sometimes I do because I'm laughing myself and have to leave the room. I could never approach a film thinking I'm setting out to make a comedy. I'm terrified by that. I'm just trying to create something that's alive (8)

The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears

Directed by HÉLÈNE CATTET, BRUNO FORZANI Starring KLAUS TANGE, URSULA BEDENA, JOE KOENER Released 11 APRIL

diène Cattet and Bruno Forzani dream in iconography. How else can one explain the filmmaking duo's near complete obsession with Giallo imagery, surreal aesthetics and warped themes? Their brilliant first feature, Amer, explored three defining moments in a traumatised woman's life through a hyperrealised lens. Extreme close-ups suggested allencompassing menace and desire, while a kinetic editing scheme further perforated all sense of reality. But there was a moody elegance to Cattet and Forzani's style that struck a formidable balance between madness and grace.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for their disjointed and shallow follow-up, *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears*. Gone is any semblance of narrative, replaced by a ramshackle



psychodrama that takes a basic premise (man looking for his missing wife) and splinters off into multiple *Giallo*-infused threads.

Dan Kristensen (Klaus Tange) returns home from a business trip only to find his wife has vanished. Their apartment has been turned upside down and a ghostly presence seems to be stalking his every move. As Dan slowly goes insane with grief and guilt, he meets other oddball characters that recite their own sadistic stories of distress. As with *Amer*, Cattet and Forzani juxtapose polarising images and sounds at an alarming rate, but *Tears* is far more interested in the violent mechanics of voyeurism.

What's worse is that *Tears* gradually numbs the audience into submission, robbing its imagery of any danger. All the split screens, synthesiser sound cues, doppelgängers, and grasping leather hands become hollow reference points for an exercise in style devoid of any human connection. GLENN HEATH JR

ANTICIPATION. How will Cattet and Forzani follow-up their brilliant debut, Amer?

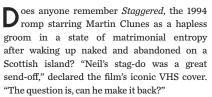
ENJOYMENT. Like being stuck on the B-side of Gaspar Noe's skewed subconscious.

IN RETROSPECT. Immensely disappointing.

1

The Stag

Directed by JOHN BUTLER
Starring ANDREW SCOTT, HUGH
O'CONOR, PETER MCDONALD
Released 7 MARCH



Twenty years later the spirit of Staggered clearly lives on in an entire generation of sub-par bachelor comedies. The latest is The Stag, a sincere but rather clunky piece of screwball fluff posing as bittersweet treatise on modern masculinity. Our groom is Fionnan (Hugh O'Connor), a dorky set designer about to tie the knot with long-suffering fiancée Ruth (Amy Huberman.) She persuades Fionnan's best friend Davin to take her fella into the wild for one final weekend with the boys.



There is plenty of hi-jinx, of course. At one point, the ill-fated stags get stuck in a tent in the middle of the camping store. Later, they take drugs, lose their clothes and get chased off a farmer's land, their respective modesties covered inadequately by makeshift belts of leaves and bracken. Hilarity overfloweth.

Davin is played by Andrew Scott, who picked up fans aplenty with a scene-stealing, face-gurningly OTT turn as the psychopathic super-villain Moriarty in season two of *Sherlock*. Sadly, Scott's transition to the big screen is botched. It's the kind of adorably awkward role you could see Simon Pegg nailing, but Scott simply doesn't have versatility. Not yet. The man never knowingly under-acts, it seems.

The same goes for the usually likeable Peter McDonald as the obnoxious brother-in-law

known only as "The Machine" (don't worry, it's never explained). Ostensibly the film's heart and soul, he's also the most irritating character in a modern comedy since Zach Galifianakis in *The Hangover*. CHRIS BLOHM

ANTICIPATION. Can TV's Moriarty make the leap to motion pictures?

2

ENJOYMENT. Makes Mrs. Brown's Boys look like Finnegans Wake.

2

IN RETROSPECT. Stag do? Stag don't.

The Machine

Directed by CARADOG W JAMES
Starring TOBY STEPHENS, CAITY
LOTZ, DENIS LAWSON
Released 21 MARCH



I t's the future. The kind of future in which the world's most terrifying cybernetic technology is buried somewhere beneath a field in Wales. Director Caradog W James' industrious but drab sci-fi thriller, *The Machine*, doesn't quite compute, despite a swathe of semi-cerebral ambitions. Toby Stephens plays Vincent McCarthy, a scientist trying to build a mechanical super-soldier during a new Cold War with China. His goal? Transform his robotic creation into a living vessel for his dying daughter, preserving her consciousness forever.

The film starts promisingly and violently, as one of McCarthy's early experiments goes neck-stabbingly awry. Put it this way, McCarthy goes through assistants like Spinal Tap go through drummers. Undaunted, he hires Ava (Lotz) to join

the team and, unbeknownst to her, play monster to his Frankenstein. Before the audience can scream "Weird Science", McCarthy's bumped her off, stuck a bunch of plastic pipes into her back, and reconstructed Ava as a sexy android with a penchant for ultraviolence. That's when things go horrifyingly wrong.

There's the occasional visual flourish, but for a film that has its heart stuck in the future, *The Machine* is directed with one eye on the past. There are cute nods to classic techno noir like *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*. Elsewhere, a supporting player turns up sporting the classic Snake Plissken beard/mullet combo. The overall vibe is early John Carpenter meets Garth Marenghi, which would be fine if film didn't take itself so damn seriously. This is sci-fi with

a straight face, and it's not afraid to ask the big philosophical questions. Questions like, "will machines ever be able to replicate the intricacy of human emotions?" Or, "does my bum look big in this unnecessarily sexualised cyborg body armour?" CHRIS BLOHM

ANTICIPATION. Best UK Film at last year's Raindance festival, plus a handful of Welsh BAFTAs.

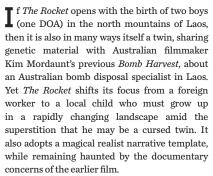
ENJOYMENT. This low-budget sci-fi plodder lacks spark.

IN RETROSPECT. Robot bores.

2

The Rocket

Directed by KIM MORDAUNT
Starring SITTHIPHON 'KI' DISAMOE,
LOUNGNAM KAOSAINAM, THEP
PHONGAM
Released 14 MARCH



Uprooted from his village by the construction of a new dam, bereft by an accident of his beloved mother and scapegoated by his new community as well as by his own grandmother and father, 10-year-old Ahlo (Sitthiphon 'Ki' Disamoe)



throws in his lot with a war-damaged James Brown obsessive (Thep Phongam) and a young orphan girl (Loungnam Kaosainem), all in the hope of finding fertile ground in which to replant his family's mango tree.

This is classic, indeed predictable, male coming-of-age fare, with Ahlo's entry into manhood and assimilation into society phallocentrically signalled by his sowing of seeds and climactic erection of a big, explosive rocket. Yet in setting this populist fable in rarely seen Laotian locations, and taking in along the way all manner of 'local colour' (animist custom, socioeconomic commentary, postwar trauma), Mordaunt brings a freshness to these otherwise stagnant waters, and slyly reveals a country in transformation. Owing to the prominence of chiropteran guano in its combustible mix, *The Rocket* also represents a surprisingly literal formula for what you might term batshit cinema — which is further earned by the inclusion of several surreal flourishes. **ANTON BITEL**

ANTICIPATION. Good buzz from its Australian release.

ENJOYMENT. Familiar furnishings, but in a fresh setting with a spectacular view.

3

IN RETROSPECT. A Lao-brow fable that resonates richly with the realities of globalisation.



Under the Skin

Directed by JONATHAN GLAZER
Starring SCARLETT JOHANSSON, ANTONIA CAMPBELL-HUGHES, PAUL BRANNIGAN
Released 14 MARCH

ne of the most stunning, traumatising moments of morbidity in Under the Skin has nothing to do with Venus flytrap aliens, but with the wretchedness of Scottish weather. What starts out as a sunny day on a beach for a picnicking couple with baby in tow results in four deaths: after their dog gets caught up in the current, the wife tries to rescue it, but gets caught in the current herself as the wind suddenly picks up. Her husband sees her distress, and jumps in too. He fares no better. A Czech tourist (who briefly flirts with Scarlett Johannsson, our murderous protagonist) manages with tremendous effort to drag the husband back to shore, but he immediately turns back around in pursuit of the wife. While the tourist lies on the beach recovering from the struggle, Johannsson - who has blankly witnessed all of this from about five metres away - saunters over and bashes his head in with a rock, then drags his corpse across the rocky beach back to her van. The couple's baby, too small to stand, can only scream against the crashing waves at the prospect of being abandoned; later that night, the baby cries no less intensely as Johannsson's assistant (Jeremy McWilliams, who is simply known as "The Bad Man") returns to pick up the towels they left behind.

How quickly this disaster escalates. Its icy matter-of-factness, and Johannsson's transformation from calculating, idle voyeur to clever opportunist, is emblematic of the film at large. Atmosphere wins out over explication or intricate plotting. Favouring visceral abstractions and sumptuous images which hark back to the best of his "weird" mid-'90s music videos, *Under the Skin* also shies away from a traditional three-act structure, existing in two parts, the first of which is an extended social experiment. Tooling around Glasgow in

her white Transit van, her "useful" encounters, which result in taking a male victim back to her place for what can be best described as "depulping", are outnumbered by polite chats that go nowhere in particular. Only the most laddish, tats 'n' six-pack abs boys actually flirt back.

This narcissism is evident in the means of their destruction. The pitch-black interior of her lair is slightly reflective and, as she strips off her clothes, they proudly follow behind her, as if they were strutting down a catwalk, oblivious to the fate that awaits them just a few feet ahead. Of course, this stage wouldn't have been possible unless Johannsson hadn't traded in the benefits of a three-point lighting system and PhotoShop for a crunchy black wig and red lipstick. She is a movie star with above-average looks, but here she's required to go unnoticed in Glasgow's shopping district and slip away silently from too-obvious a crime. She's also brave enough to invite complete strangers into her van.

It's these questions of perceiving and developing a sense of self and how women exist in Western society that shifts the story into a different gear. After picking up a man who escapes from her clutches, she takes a long look in a mirror, and then runs away to a remote town in the Highlands. No longer burdened by the need to hunt or engage in small talk, she takes small steps to understand humanity, and subsequently experiences the heights of human kindness and love and the worst of human violence and cruelty.

Whether or not her departure from Glasgow is motivated by remorse, boredom, curiosity or capriciousness remains unclear, for *Under the Skin* operates under the assumption that even if a lion could talk, we could not understand what she said. These semi-Lacanian "mirror

phase" moments, where she further explores her body, neither fully human nor alien, don't feel sensual, humorous or clinical. She is still simply trying to process her experiences, unable to yet articulate a hypothesis. Though the film's dominant themes are loneliness and tension, its concluding note is one of frustrated existential incompleteness: whatever she was moving towards is prematurely snatched away, if it ever could've been reached at all.

The spectrum of human behaviour is studied through a series of small, silent moments in these latter scenes - fiddling with the radio knob while washing the dishes or eating a piece of cake. The beauty of these asides only intensifies in contrast to the abstract visual effects and fantastical moments. Mica Levi's orchestral score, full of shrieking glissandos and two-step beats, forms a singularity between international art house and big budget science-fiction fare. Perhaps it's because some audiences are unable or unwilling to make sense of something that invests so much in visual storytelling, but it's a shame there aren't more films like this. VIOLET LUCCA

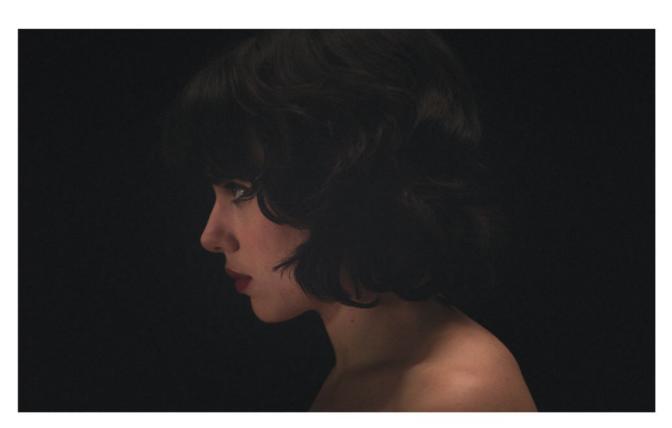
ANTICIPATION. It's been 10 years since Jonathan Glazer last made a feature film.

ENJOYMENT. With its 2001: A Space Odyssey visuals and driving orchestral score, Under the Skin will put you under its spell.

IN RETROSPECT. Few films will linger with you like this one does.

5





Mica Levi

The classically trained alt-pop star talks exclusively to *LWLies* about her seductive debut score for *Under the Skin*.

Levi has been writing and playing music for as long as she can remember. Now aged 27, Levi rose to prominence in 2009 when her band Micachu & The Shapes released their debut LP, 'Jewellery'. It was the band's 2011 live recording of a one-off performance with the London Sinfonietta, however, that caught the attention of writer/director Jonathan Glazer. He hired Levi to score his feature-length adaptation of Michel Faber's 2000 novel 'Under the Skin', despite her having no previous filmscoring experience. LWLies recently found out how she rose to the challenge.

Listen And Learn

With the band there's a familiarity there, we know how each other work. This was very different, but different is good sometimes. What was great about working on this was the collaboration. The way Jon spoke about the film... he wasn't talking like he had ownership over it, that wasn't the attitude he took with it. Usually, when I make music with my band we'll talk about musical things, we'll use musical language. Jon doesn't have that vocabulary but he's got an amazing ear, and he'd communicate in metaphor and in visuals, and he was so clear, so specific with everything he said.

He'd find different ways to get his point across, but it allowed you space to do your version. That was really important because it's such a nuanced film and there are so many subtleties to it. The feel and the pace of the film all centre around Scarlett's character, and the tone of the music had to follow suit. If the material is too dense then you end up with these really heavy, intense musical sequences which can upset the balance of the film.

Do Your Homework

Now when I watch a film I'm more aware of



the music. The kinds of film scores I liked before were the early Disney stuff, or stuff from the '50s... Bernard Herrmann... classical stuff. I've got a bit of a thing for it I guess. That's what I'm interested in, not so much soundtracks done by bands, although you do get led to some amazing music by watching films.

I watched a Fassbinder film recently, Katzelmacher, which has a really amazing score. There's an amazing piano piece - maybe a Chopin piece or something - that's interspersed throughout this scene where these two people are walking down a road. It's just brilliant. That was the last piece that really stood out to me. But I've never been a really filmy person. Jon showed me a lot of great films, and I watch a lot more now. We showed each other a lot of different stuff, it was really quite exciting, that sharing and discovery. But I think Jon was careful not to influence me too much, I think one of the reasons why he hired me in the first place was my inexperience, my rawness, I guess you might call it.

Don't Be Scared To Be Wrong

Doing this has changed my perception of my role in the band, which primarily is to write the lyrics. I've learned a lot about art and different artistic approaches, but also discipline, how to handle a given structure. There's a lot of music in the film, around 50 minutes if you were to lay it down as a single track, and it requires a lot of discipline and patience. But the support I got was incredible. It was just so important. We'd make quite a lot of jokes to keep each other going. Whenever something would get written that didn't work, we'd immediately hate on it and talk about how shit it was. You need that in any collaboration I think, someone to tell you when something's not working.

Trust Your Instinct

I knew that it was my duty to say what I thought. There's loads of people to mediate. If you don't trust your instinct, if you're not prepared to stick your neck out for what you believe is right, you're fucked. It's such a difficult balancing act as it is, making a film, so you've got to have complete confidence in your abilities. You get sick of the sound of your own voice though, that's one thing. But if you're wrong you'll know, because everyone knows when it's wrong and everyone knows when it's right.

There was one thing that got adjusted right at the end in the dub, which was to do with one sound getting raised in the mix. We knew this scene wasn't working, but nobody could work it out, everyone was pulling their hair out. And then Johnnie Burn, who was doing the sound, raised the sound of a zip and everything changed. It was crazy. It was almost irritating because it was so simple. But that's the thing, there's no method to it, you've just got to try it and see what works



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Home Ents

Man of Marble (1977)

Directed by ANDRZEJ WAJDA
Starring KRYSTYNA JANDA, JERZY
RADZIWILOWICZ, TADEUSZ
LOMNICKI
Released 14 APRIL
Format DOUBLE DVD



he brittle beauty of Andrzej Wajda's dazzling 1977 film about the gradual dismantling of an eerie Polish propaganda film from the early communist era stems from the fact that it operates as both an electrifying political saga and a philosophical lament to the inherent untruths of cinema. Jerzy Radziwilowicz plays bricklayer Mateusz Birkut, a wide-eyed hero of socialist labour and unwitting Stakhanovite icon who is one day plucked from obscurity and appropriated as the subject of a newsreel in which he achieves the inhuman feat of laying 30,000 bricks in a single shift. Glory awaits in

the form of a giant marble statue, though flash forward to the early '70s and that very same symbol of socialist might lays dormant in a dank basement archive, discovered by Krystyna Janda's obsessively driven film student, Agnieszka, who smells a story.

As she talks to everyone involved in the film in a bid to track down Birkut himself, she discovers that the smiles on that day were painted and that it was little more than a patchwork of opportunistic machinations carried out by a director hungry for fame. *Man of Marble* addresses the delicate notion

of history as being a process of countermanipulation: it has often been written by the winners, and so it is the responsibility of later generations to consume "facts" with the utmost vigilance. The transfer on this Second Run disc is typically crisp, taken as it is from a brand new digital restoration of the film. Extras include video interviews with Wajda plus uncredited assistant-director Agnieszka Holland, who — ironically, considering the nature of the film itself — had her name expunged from titles at the behest of the Polish authorities. DAVID JENKINS

White Dog (1982)

Directed by SAMUEL FULLER Starring KRISTY MCNICHOL, CHRISTA LANG, VERNON WEDDLE Released 24 MARCH Format DUAL FORMAT DVD-BLU-RAY

5 helved for 10 years on its completion in 1982 when it was dismissed by distributors as a wanton political powder-keg, Samuel Fuller's savage, late-career barnstormer lives on as one of the most nuanced, sophisticated and provocative discussions of racism ever committed to film. On paper, *White Dog* appears little more than a piece of hysterical B-movie hokum with a killer-hook: Kristy McNichol's struggling TV actress knocks over a white German Shepherd on a hillside byway and decides to nurse it back to health before attempting to locate its owner. She develops a loving bond with this apparently docile mutt,



but when it keeps returning to her house slathered in fresh blood, she realises that something is up. It turns out that what she has on her hands is a "white dog", a beast that has been trained to attack black people on sight.

Avoiding any obvious recourse to horrorthriller pyrotechnics (although the film remains both horrific and thrilling), Fuller's film reveals itself as an essay on behavioural conditioning which is far more trenchant and subtle than Stanley Kubrick's similarly inclined *A Clockwork Orange*. Fuller, a stickler for pragmatism and an enemy of psychobabble, unfolds the story so the dog's rehabilitation remains unpredictable to the last, the revelation being that this is less a film about the fact that human and animal minds can be artificially warped, than the moral impetus behind both disease and cure. Adding further to its depth and controversial credentials are the constant (but never button-pushing) use of Holocaust imagery, from lingering shots of a gas chamber used to destroy stray dogs, to the concentration camp-like set-up of the animal sanctuary where the "evil" dog is finally impounded. This Masters of Cinema release arrives in a new 1080p transfer and with a new booklet of critical essays. DAVID JENKINS

Home Ents

White of the Eye (1987)

Directed by DONALD CAMMELL Starring DAVID KEITH, CATHY MORIARTY, ALAN ROSENBERG Released 24 MARCH Format DUAL FORMAT DVD-BLU-RAY

Redolent of both early Michael Mann, Giallo and the French cinéma du look, this supremely strange and ornate magic-hour slasher movie is best experienced as an exercise in high gloss and bombastic style. A tooled-up maniac with an eye for the macabre is on the loose in the dusty suburbs of Tuscon, Arizona. Each carefully selected victim is carved up and left for the police as an interactive art installation, sundry body parts missing without proper explanation.

This third feature by idiosyncratic director Donald Cammell, after the immaculate



one-two punch of *Performance* (1970) and *Demon Seed* (1977), is co-written with his wife China Kong and offers up eye-gouging images that are very much in the arty spirit of his psychotic antagonist. The camera dips and dives through each scene, the editing — with its random cross-fades, fuzzed-up dissolves and grandiose desert vistas — occasionally verges on the experimental, and Cammell sticks to a rigid primary colour palette of deep reds and dazzling yellows to ironically emphasise the disparity of the modernist killer's modus operandi. The family at the centre of the film

(and, later, the encroaching murder plot) are the Whites, with David Keith as a cordial, trucker-cap sporting AV installation expert trying to fend off advances from the police and bored houswwives, and Cathy Moriarty as his sultry earth-mother wife. White of the Eye makes little sense as an involving and sophisticated narrative, but a whole lot of sense as a running, jumping and vaulting piece of pure, personalised cinematic invention. This newly-restored print is released on the always-interesting, always-immaculate Arrow Video imprint. DAVID JENKINS

Celluloid Man (2012)

Directed by SHIVENDRA SINGH DUNGARPUR Starring PK NAIR Released 24 MARCH Format DVD

There's a scene in Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's sprawling documentary in which an unnamed figure in a dingy backroom takes discarded reels of film and dips them into a vat of chemicals. He then collects the silver nitrate residue in order to produce and sell trinkets while the film hangs on a washing line. What once housed images of cinematic wonderment is now entirely naked. *Celluloid Man* is, in essence, a chronicle of the long, hard fight to preserve these precious images for future generations, and it's a story told via the life and times of aged film archivist and obsessive cinephile,



PK Nair. Often thought of as India's answer to France's late, great 'man of cinema', Henri Langlois, Nair toils day and night to make sure that prints of local and world classics are obtained, catalogued and stored.

The title refers directly to Nair's occupation, but it also signals his passion for the tactile qualities of film over the intangible and unreliable digital format which is slowly taking over the industry. During its 160-minute runtime, the film divides itself between presenting the physical and moral minutiae of the archiving process (often Nair would nab touring festival prints and have lab

boys make him a cheeky overnight copy), and the uneasy overlap of Nair's professional and private life. Call it an unconvincing get-out clause, or call it a expression of earnest passion, but Nair sees life and experience in movies and believes that, while he may have been a less-than-stellar husband and father, it was through watching films that he was constantly reminded of this fact. The film, released by Second Run and packaged with a new essay by Mark Cousins, also contains a plethora of amazing clips from obscure Indian films, which are alone worth the asking price of this disc. DAVID JENKINS



ith heavy snow and temperatures teetering around the -10°C mark in Sweden's second largest city, there's no better place to spend some late January days than in the cinema. A programme showcasing the greatest hits of last year's festival circuit, as well as countless homegrown and neighbouring premieres, the only decision to be made at the Gothenburg International Film Festival was how to make up your five-a-day cinematic diet.

More than a dozen cinemas, all within easy walking (and slipping) distance from the festival's hub, were programmed to the hilt over an 11-day run, with films grouped into easily negotiable categories based on award contention, country of origin or auterist recognition.

The latter, split into sections labelled 'Visionaries' and 'Masters', unsurprisingly proved the most consistently fascinating of the festival's various strands, although not without its duds. Terry Gilliam's *The Zero Theorem* was an early disappointment, content to reconfigure old ideas into a bleakly cynical, lethargic examination of rampant technological progress.

Infinitely more satisfying was the first film in 13 years from Chilean cinematic singularity, Alejandro Jodorowsky, whose *The Dance of Reality* exceeded even this fervent fan's expectations. If his 1989 film *Santa Sangre* was

the filmmaker's ode to mothers, this time Jodorowsky trips the auto-slipstream back to childhood to paint a wildly imaginative (and imagined) portrait of his father. Never less than bold and barmy, a deeply ingrained political undercurrent remains close to the surface. It's Jodorowsky's most successfully realised film to date: the work of a unique director mining the personal and the political like never before.

It wouldn't have been right to travel to a Swedish film festival and pass up an opportunity to catch a documentary on the country's master filmmaker. Trespassing Bergman skilfully married rare archive production footage with enough excerpts of the director's work to send one out determined to fill any and all gaps in one's knowledge of his films. While there was great pleasure to found in the astonishing line-up of talking heads waxing lyrical on Bergman's oeuvre, the best value for money (unsurprisingly) came from Lars von Trier's impish iconoclasm. Whether speculating on the great filmmaker's masturbation habits ("His cock always concerned me") or expressing wonder at his admiration for cinematographer Sven Nykvist ("You'd have to be a technological idiot to think that was impressive"), von Trier proved an affectionate thorn in the side of the fulsome tributes.

Elsewhere, it was a great year for debuts. Those we saw knocked the wind out of the main competition without exception. Narimane Mari's *Bloody Beans* offers a stylistically confident take on the French occupation of Algeria from the perspective of a group of pugnacious kids, tied together by a fantastic electro-score from Zombie Zombie, while Rok Biček's *Class Enemy* suffered little in comparrison to Laurent Cantet's *The Class*, whose moral inquiries it broadly echoes.

Yet if there was one film which served to eclipse everything else at the festival by a considerable margin, it was Aleksey German's magnificent sci-fi epic, Hard to be a God. Over 15 years in production, this three hour, black and white, Russian masterwork simply has to be seen to be believed. Set on a planet 800 years behind Earth but otherwise identical, never before has what ostensibly reads as the Middle Ages been so viscerally realised on film. German never got to see his film premiere, having died shortly before its completion. As swansongs go, it's up there with Béla Tarr's The Turin Horse as a statement of auteurist might. Just as there was little that came close to it in Gothenburg, it'll take something utterly extraordinary to better it in 2014 @



n international film festival that takes place largely in a plush, glass-and-steel shopping precinct could hardly be read as an ideal marriage of landscape and left-field artistic intent. Yet there's also something inherently subversive about this set-up, just as there is to bringing the cream of arthouse cinema to a tacky beach resort (Cannes) or man-made island landfill (Venice).

Berlin's Forumstrand, reserved for the more esoteric titles in the line-up, are screened in a giant multiplex, which is some senses presents these festivals as one of the great, necessary levellers of cinema. There was a certain added joy to seeing Corneliu Porumboiu's experimental, football based video-piece, *The Second Game*, on a decent-sized screen and from seats with cup holders. The film consists of fuzzy recorded TV footage of a 1988 derby between Bucharest club giants Dinamo and Steaua, as the director and his father — an ex-referee who oversaw the game — offer commentary on the action.

As well as being a beautiful, moving portrait of a father-son relationship and a wry satire on the banality of football commentary, the film is also Porumboiu's deconstruction of his own ultra-minimalist dramas such 12:08 East of Bucharest and Police, Adjective.

Also subversive, challenging and pretty damn great — albeit in almost imperceptibly subtle ways — was *Life of Riley*, the new film by nonagenarian master, Alain Resnais. A gaudy Northern English bed-swapping farce by Alan Ayckbourn is recalibrated with PVC drapes, brightly illustrated transition shots and blue screen inserts. Of a piece with his previous meta-theatrical doodle, *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*, Resnais' film is shocking in its apparent sobriety and the manner in which deeper inquiry into the differences between theatre and film are tucked between the folds of each frame.

The strongest feature in an altogether weak competition was a work which divided audiences. Was it a po-faced drama or very dark comedy? In 13 chapters, most of which consist of a single, static line take, the brilliant Stations of the Cross by Dietrich Brüggemann sees a devoutly religious teenage girl opt for sacrificing her life in line with the tenets of her faith. Though directly critical and gently mocking of extreme Catholicism and its place in the modern world, the the film is about the incompatibility of belief systems in general, suggesting that rules to live by are merely rules that needlessly annex you from friends and neighbours.

The Brits were in town, but with mixed results. Yann Demange's Greengrassian '71 drafts in current it-boy Jack O'Connell as a wet-behind-the-ears private who, along with his similarly unprepared battalion, is dumped onto the mean streets of Belfast in the midst of the Troubles. A serviceable action movie with some impressive attention to period detail, the film never quite adds up to more than its grimly pretty parts. Yet '71 looks like La Règle du Jeu when compared to Pascal Chaumeil's sickmakingly horrific and blithely wrong-headed suicide comedy, A Long Way Down, adapted from a 2005 novel by Nick Hornby. We won't go into gory details here, but among the manifold cinematic atrocities it proffers, Imogen Poots' mugging performance is one that even her own mother would likely be cool on.

On a lighter note, Taiwan's Tsai Ming-liang dazzled with his new medium-length work, Journey to the West, in which his collaborator and muse Lee Kang-sheng is joined by Denis Lavant on the bustling streets of Marseilles to lope — in super slow motion — among the crowds. It's a film that, instead of being desperate to impress with all manner of contrived bells and whistles, simply asks us to take time to soak up the beauty right there in front of our eyes.

Meet the Feebles

DIRECTED BY

Peter Jackson

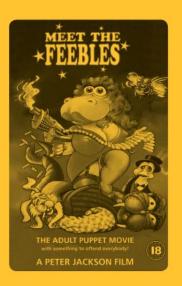
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II: Lost in the City.

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"'Anal Antics'...? Yes!
- it'll appeal to the
intellectuals!"



TAGLINE **Puppet Spunk Hits The Fan!**

(1989)

ad about all you can take of the Muppets? Feel you've done your allotted time within the cosy, padded confines of Disney Jail and are now fit and able to face the stark, grey actuality of what passes for your daily life? Ah, if only it were that easy. For just as Tim Robbins had to swim through a purgatorial passage of literal shit to escape the cold, stony embrace of Shawshank Prison, so you, reader, must first take a deep breath, petition whatever gods you pray to and breaststroke your way to freedom through the foul and pestilent tsunami of scalding bumjuice that is Peter Jackson's nonemore-squalid Fuzzy-Felt aria, *Meet the Feebles*.

Imagine if the Muppets were all jacked up, tooled up and sexed up. If backstage life wasn't a thespian whirl of banzai camaraderie but a crepuscular fuck-party with all the glitz of a cannibal autopsy. That Jim Henson wasn't a beardy egalitarian kook but a skeezy acid casualty with one foot in the arms trade. Imagine someone took a showreel of all your most deeply ingrained childhood nightmares and spliced in some grainy Super-8 footage of your grandparents having drunken, messy sex... The kinky, shit-flecked yin to the Muppets' joyous yang, the Feebles form an inescapably noxious wave of pure fetid horror that will clog your every pore.

The cheap puns come readily to hand: the Feebles are the Muppet crack-Babies; they're all high on Fraggle Rocks; they're Sesame Street-trash sucking on some Dark Crystal-meth. Such comparisons seem apt when we initially join the gang in rehearsals for a salty variety show that's to be aired live on New Zealand TV (sample song: 'Sodomy'; sample lyric: 'open up your ring and try it front to bum!'), but it soon becomes monstrously apparent that this snug and familiar set-up is just an excuse for P-Jax to ram a series of increasingly fiendish cherry-bombs down the broken lavvy of cinematic good taste.

'Pshaw!', you say? Witness a harmless round of pitch and putt between two rancid Gwar monsters on a nine-hole municipal course overlooking suburban Auckland that serves as a front for a heroin buy and culminates with a Morris Minor being driven through a whale's anus. Or perhaps you prefer a giant walrus engaged in furious intercourse with a meerkat? A strung-out crocodile with a knife-throwing act who's plagued by hyper-violent and horrifically racist Vietnam flashbacks? A heartbroken hippo with a chain-gun and a death-wish? What about a manic-depressive rabbit being slowly reduced to a festering mulch of decaying fur by psychosomatically induced AIDS lesions?

Not since Pasolini's Salò has so much wanton degradation been smeared across a cinema screen. At least the Italian master refrained from S&M scenes of nasal sex between a grasshopper a Friesian cow, but, to be fair, it's not every film that draws inspiration from Kiss of the Spider Woman, The Banana Splits and fabled barnyard porno Animal Farm all within the space of a single scene.

Did any of it land? The New York Times review nodded snooty approval toward Jackson's wherewithal in "staging action sequences that stretch the boundaries of ordinary puppet drama", whatever and wherever they are. Time Out came nearer the mark when asking, "why anyone would go to all this bother to make a string of gags about vomiting, pissing, shitting, jissom pressure, bunnilingus and knicker-sniffing anteaters?" But last word must go to long-defunct Kiwi film bible Shooter's Luck who, despite featuring a beaming Jackson on the cover of their December '89 issue, reviewed Meet the Feebles in the darker recesses of their 'Adult' section and awarded it only 1 Wank out of 5 on their Tossometer. The bludgers!



"HILARIOUS AND WICKEDLY CLEVER"

THE PLAYLIST

"A DELIGHTFULLY NOIR COMEDY"

KATE MUIR. THE TIMES





"A TRUE ORIGINAL"



"BRILLIANT"



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IN CINEMAS APRIL 4

COLL TO

"Have a drink, mate? Have a fight, mate? Have a taste of dust and sweat, mate? There's nothing else out here."

TED KOTCHEFF







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KERMIT THE FROG:

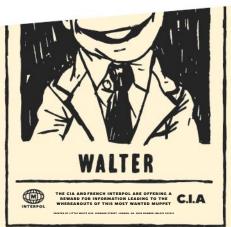
I'M SHORT, SO I USUALLY GET IN FOR A KID'S TICKET PRICE . I'M KIDDING . I ADORE THE MOVIES. THEY'RE DREAMS YOU SEE WITH YOUR EYES OPEN. AND THE FIRST TIME I SAW A MOVIE, I KNEW THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO DO - TO FOLLOW MY DREAM AND END UP ON THE BIG SCREEN. AND IF THAT DREAM CAN COME TRUE FOR A TALKING EROG LIKE ME, THEN ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE. MOVIES TAUGHT ME THAT.

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO FLASH. MAY OUR LONG DEBATE OVER SWEET VERSUS SALT POPCORN CONTINUE! (SALT WINS OF COURSE)

GONZO







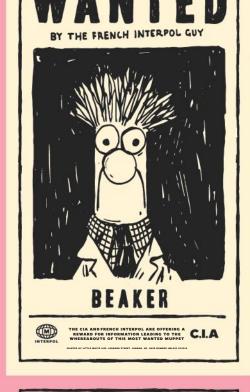






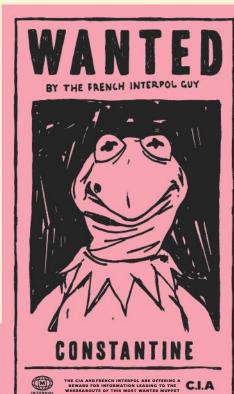




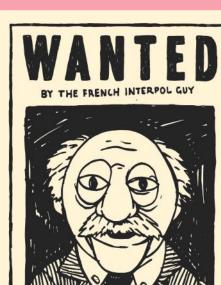


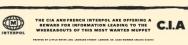






THE CIA AND FRENCH INTERPOL ARE OFFERING A REWARD FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF THIS MOST WANTED MUPPET





WALDORF

WANTED



Tom at the farm directed by XAVIER DOLAN

"MATURE, COMPLEX AND STRANGELY ROMANTIC"

"XAVIER DOLAN'S BEST FILM"

Little White Lies

IN CINEMAS APRIL 4



